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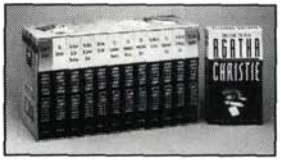

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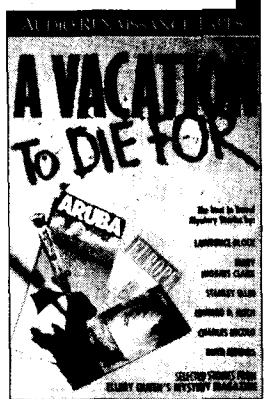

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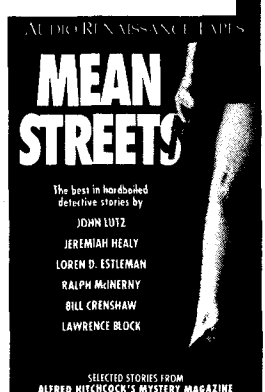

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Contents

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN®

If It's Got Your Number	Celia Fremlin	**4**
The Devil and his Due	Dorothy Salisbury Davis	**16**
Slowly, Slowly in the Wind	Patricia Highsmith	**24**
The Empress of the Sea	Milt Rosen	**40**
Arms and the Woman	Karen M. Sine	**47**
Events at Drimaghleen	William Trevor	**56**
The Jury Box	Jon L. Breen	**74**
The Theft of the Lucky Cigar	Edward D. Hoch	**77**
EQMM 50th Anniversary Contest		**92**
Snapping Out of It	Bruce Holland Rogers	**95**
Brass Knuckles	Rupert Holmes	**100**
A Sense of Injustice	Donald Olson	**103**
The Misfit	Phyllis Diller	**114**
Fore!	Phyllis Diller	**116**
Double Image	Roy Vickers	**121**

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ISSUE #587—DEDICATED TO PATRICIA HIGHSMITH, DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS, AND CELIA FREMLIN

Graham Greene called Patricia Highsmith "the poet of apprehension rather than fear" and a writer who has created "a world claustrophobic and irrational which we enter each time with a sense of personal danger." After the success in 1950 of her first book, Strangers on a Train, *which was made into the classic film by Alfred Hitchcock, she resolved to do no more "hack" writing, no matter how precarious her finances.*

She chose "Slowly, Slowly in the Wind" to represent her short fiction in this special issue by saying, "Readers like Skip Skipperton because he is a strong character and goes after what he wants."

Born in Fort Worth, Texas, and educated at Barnard College, Highsmith has lived in Europe since 1963. She has received a Silver Dagger and the Grand Prixe de Litterature Policiere.

Dorothy Salisbury Davis was born in April 1916 in Chicago and raised on a farm in Wisconsin. In 1985, she was awarded MWA's Grand Master Award for lifetime achievement. Stanley Ellin called her short stories "an experience for the reader, a sinuous, purposeful winding through a labyrinth toward a resolution which leaves the reader much to brood about. No less than four of her novels and three of her stories have been honored along the way by nomination for Edgar Allan Poe Awards as best of the year."

Celia Fremlin, who received an Edgar for her novel The Hours Before Dawn *in 1959, was born in Kent, England in 1914 and educated at Oxford. She served as an air-raid warden during World War II, a fact not irrelevent to the story we've chosen to represent her unique and poignant short fiction here.*

She has said: "What I aim at, I think, is an exciting or even terrifying plot set against a very ordinary sort of humdrum domestic background with a hero or heroine beset by day-to-day problems as well as the mysterious outside threat. I find that by this juxtaposition I can throw across my characters a kind of lurid sort of illumination which enables me to explore them in much greater depth than I could by any other means . . ."

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IF IT'S GOT YOUR NUMBER

by CELIA FREMLIN

Just catching sight of the woman for a second time didn't prove that she was a store detective. Well, of course it didn't. Clutching the shopping bag with a hand already slippery with sweat, Martha forced herself to maintain her strolling, leisurely pace, past the glittering racks of cocktail dresses, past the sumptuous evening skirts of velvet and brocade—slowly, slowly does it.

If she once let herself quicken her steps by no matter how small a fraction, she knew she would be lost. Panic would seize her, she would break into a run, make a dash for the escalator, and by that time the whole shop would be after her, not merely this slim elegant woman in the oatmeal trouser-suit.

"*After her!*" How ridiculous! Martha struggled to control her galloping imagination, to think beyond the wild hammering of guilt in her brain, and to consider, coolly, the factual, commonsense reality of her situation.

No one had seen her take the dress. Indeed, in the raucous, blood-red darkness of Young Ideas, with pop music blaring out and the long-haired boys and girls roaming between the clothes like a herd of jungle creatures—in such a setting it would have been hard enough for anyone to notice anything, let alone to bother about such a dull, middle-aged customer as herself.

She had been all alone behind the tight-packed maxi-dresses at the far end of the room, out of sight of everyone, and even with time to make her choice. No one had seen her, either, as she slipped out from behind the rack with her spoils; and now here she was, already half the length of the store away from the scene of her crime, in a different department altogether.

And as for the woman in the oatmeal suit—why, it was coincidence, sheer coincidence, that she should have turned up in this department as well. She wasn't even looking in Martha's direction—hadn't been, either, on that earlier occasion, when they'd passed each other on the way out of Young Ideas.

What would the woman have seen, anyway, even if she *had*

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looked? Just one more plump, smartly dressed, middle-aged woman strolling through Cocktail and Evening Wear with a shopping bag in her hand. Exactly like all the other middle-aged women who had come shopping this winter Thursday afternoon. All of them smart, all of them with shopping bags in their hands, and all of them—well, an awful lot of them, anyway—with lines of tension round their mouths and a look of furtive anxiety in their eyes, even though they hadn't (well, Martha presumed they hadn't) stolen anything at all.

So there was nothing to mark her out from the rest of them. Absolutely nothing. Stupid to allow her heart to race like this, her hands to sweat! All she had to do was to keep dawdling along—she was in Day Dresses now—pausing to examine a neckline here, a price tag there, just to keep her nerve, and all would be well.

At last the escalator! As she set foot on the moving track and saw the ground floor gliding up to meet her, Martha felt the kind of thankfulness and gratitude that the pilot of a damaged plane must feel as he catches sight of the perfect spot for an emergency landing. For the crowd down there on the ground floor was so large, and packed so tight in all the aisles, that surely all possibility of detection would soon be over.

Down, down she sailed, diving toward that milling anonymous sea of humanity like a fish escaping back into its native element.

Safe! Safe! In her relief Martha almost skipped off the end of the escalator, and as she began to battle her way through the crowd toward the main entrance, she was aware of an exultation that went far beyond the satisfaction of having successfully acquired an £8.50 dress without paying for it. It was as if what she had done was some kind of victory of the human spirit, a slap in the face of middle age. It was even an argument of sorts—a clinching final argument in the dreary long-drawn-out conflict with her husband.

"*See*, Leonard?" her theft seemed to be saying to him, in gleeful triumph. "*See? That'll* show you!"—though what he was to "see," and how the theft was going to "show" him, she had no idea. Especially since, God willing, Leonard was never going to know anything about it at all.

Already the entrance doors were in sight. Beyond them she could see the glittering dusk of Oxford Street, lit up like fairyland against the coming night. I've done it, I've done it! she found herself exulting in wordless joy as she pushed and squeezed her way toward the jam-packed entrance. It's worked, it's succeeded!—and in that very mo-

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ment, just as the revolving doors were drawing her in, she became aware of the woman in the oatmeal suit, not a yard away from her.

Martha did not know how far along Oxford Street she had been running before her breath gave out. Not very far, probably, for her muscles and her wind were not what they had once been. Not what they had been before—well, before security and Leonard and a nice home had got their grip on her. Before television and chocolates and over-lavish cocktail parties had become the pattern of her days.

"Everything a woman could want!" Leonard had once launched this hackneyed reproach at her in the course of one of their weary rows, and of course he had been right. She *had* everything—and how, over the years, it had sucked the strength out of her muscles, the zest out of her soul. The strength and the zest which once, long ago . . .

"Excuse me, madam."

Maybe the words were not addressed to Martha at all. Or maybe, even if they were, it was only some stranger asking the way to Selfridge's. She would never know. For before the sentence could be completed she was off and away, battering once more through the crowds, pushing, dodging, worming her way through the interstices of this human maze until, at last, she found herself at the entrance to an Underground station.

Which station it was she did not know and did not care. Headlong she plunged into its seething, anonymous security; and in almost no time at all, it seemed, she was on the train, standing, wedged tight against her fellow passengers, and with the shopping bag still clutched grimly in her left hand.

But the sense of exultation was gone now. The triumph, the exhilaration, the excitement had all drained out of her, and she felt sanity returning, like a recurrent illness.

Why? *Why* had she done it? She'd had plenty of money in her purse—Leonard had never been mean. It wasn't as if she'd even *wanted* the dress—it was ridiculous, four sizes too small at least, and years and years too young for her, with its frilly, scooped-out neckline and little puff sleeves.

Why had she done such a thing?—risking the career of her hard-working lawyer husband, at the same time possibly bringing total, irremediable humiliation on herself. She could almost see the headlines in the papers: WIFE OF WELL KNOWN BARRISTER IN COURT FOR SHOPLIFTING—and she could almost quote the story which would follow: "victim of a neurotic compulsion . . ." "psychiatric treat-

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ment" . . . "not uncommon symptom among women who feel themselves useless and unloved."

Useless and unloved. If any of the neighbors didn't know it already, they would know it now. Or would, if she wasn't very, very careful. Rousing herself, Martha glanced along the car to reassure herself that there was no oatmeal trouser-suit in sight, no official-looking person peering covertly in her direction.

She was surprised, faintly, to notice how much the rush-hour crowd had already thinned out. There were even some seats vacant. Thankfully, still clutching her shopping bag, Martha sank into the nearest empty seat. Only now had she become aware of how tired she was, how much her feet hurt. Indeed, her whole body ached with tiredness after her day's shopping—if "shopping" was the word. She leaned back gratefully on the upholstered seat and closed her eyes.

Had she dozed off? Martha sat up with a jolt, and with an uneasy feeling that a long, long time had passed. Where had they got to? Had they passed Hammersmith Broadway, where she had to change?

Peering out through the grimy window, she caught a momentary glimpse of an ill-lit platform, dingy and narrow and crowded with a confusion of people; but before she had been able to ascertain the name of the station, it was gone and they were thundering on into the darkness.

They must have passed Hammersmith long ago. That grimy, poorly lit station they had just left was wholly unfamiliar. They must be nearing the end of the line—or an even more disturbing thought, maybe she was traveling in the wrong direction altogether. Maybe, in her state of confusion and panic, she had got onto an eastbound train by mistake.

Yes, that must be it. How infuriating! Now she would have to cross over to the other side of the line and perhaps wait ages for a return train. She would be late getting home, that was certain! Leonard would be home before her; he would be waiting, irritable, wanting to know where she'd been, what had kept her so long.

Clutching her guilty shopping bag, would she be able to answer him brightly, convincingly? Or would she find herself blushing and stammering and watching the weary suspicion growing in his cool, appraising eyes?

The train was slowing down now, and gathering her things together Martha prepared to leave. Funny how few people there were on the train now. Just a small group of soldiers, and an old man

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slumped as if in sleep. The lighting was strange, too, so feeble and dim. Something must have gone wrong, but at this point in her thoughts the train came to a halt and the doors slid open.

"Please, what station is this?" she asked the man who was pushing past her into the train; but to her surprise he merely laughed.

"Not much odds, is it, sweetheart?" he remarked jocosely. "So's you're a hundred feet down, that's all you want to worry about, a night like this! Hell, it's bloody murder up there!"—and he passed, whistling, into the train.

"Well!" Martha stood on the platform, speechless, as the train drew away. The cheek of the fellow! Was he a nut or something? And only now did she turn and really look at her surroundings.

It was all exactly as she remembered it. The rolls of bedding, the deck chairs, the snug little family parties, with a blanket outspread to mark their territory on the platform, with Mum in the middle dispensing sandwiches and cups of tea, for all the world as if this was a seaside outing. And the old men playing Housey Housey, and the kids larking about, much too near the edge of the platform, the Shelter Wardens shouting at them good-humoredly. And Charlie. Yes, there was Charlie in his usual place at the end of the platform, just tuning up on his accordion.

"You're new here, ain't you, sister?" a kindly, middle-aged man addressed her, and Martha started, as if awakened from sleep. "Me? Oh!" She stopped. "No, I'm old, old!" had been the reply on the tip of her tongue. "I've been here more than thirty years!" But of course she mustn't disconcert him with such incomprehensible nonsense.

"N-no, I'm not staying, I'm on my way home," she stammered, a strange and incredulous joy growing in her as she spoke. "I have to go—" but as she moved toward the exit, the man laid a friendly, restraining hand on her shoulder.

"I'd stop down here for a bit if I were you, sister," he advised. "Old Jerry ain't half going it tonight! Ain't 'e, Sid?" He appealed for confirmation to an older man, perched on a roll of bedding at their feet and sucking at his pipe.

" 'S'right!" agreed this new contributor to the discussion. " 'S' a real bad 'un tonight! I said it'd be bad, din' I, when them sirens went early? Not five o'clock, it wasn't—I 'adn' 'ad me tea. I don' like it, I says. When them sirens goes early, it means a rough night, I says. 'E only starts up that early when 'e's got a real packet for us! Like that Wednesday when—"

A clatter of running feet along the platform interrupted him. Two

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youths, rosy with danger, alight with glory from the terrible Outside, were racing along the platform, drunk with news.

"The Ship's got it!" they yelled in that strange ecstasy of disaster that Martha remembered so well. "Yeah, the Shipton Arms—a direct hit. You can't see it no more, it's all nothin', just bricks an' smoke an' all. Yeah, we seen it! We was right there!"

This was happiness! This was glory! This was living! Martha could see it in the lads' eyes, hear it in their voices, feel it in their gestures. This was the happiness that she, too, had known—she and Basil, glorying in their young daring and in the young strength of their limbs as they raced hand in hand through the gunfire in the empty, blacked-out streets, along a razor edge of death, experiencing such an ecstasy as she would never know again.

Unless? This very night? Just once more? Would this dream, this magic, whatever it was—would it last just long enough for that? Were the gods indeed granting her, after thirty stagnant years, another chance?

"I must go," she repeated, almost choking with hope. "My boy friend's waiting for me"—and brushing aside the kindly protests of the shelterers she set off running up the long, long spiral stairs that led to the outside world.

Yes, running. If she had not guessed it already from the tremulous joy in her heart, she knew now, for certain, that she was young again. These winding, endless flights of steps meant nothing to her young limbs as she skipped and bounded upward, the stolen dress bumping and swinging against her as she ran.

So *this* was why she had chosen it—a dress for a young girl, so slim, so gay, so daring! She had known all along that it was right for her, for her real, true self.

Faster she ran, and faster; up and up the echoing spiral curves, up and up, on and on, tireless as a mountain deer, knowing that there, at the top, Basil would be waiting.

Every evening since the beginning of the Blitz he had waited for her up there. Night after night he would come rushing from his job in the West End, all the way out here, just to meet her as she came out of the tube and to escort her safely along the Mile End Road to her home. Together they would race through the black deserted streets, the crack of gunfire in their ears and the shrapnel clattering on the pavements before and behind.

They met no one—the empty, perilous streets belonged only to

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them—and as they tore through the whistling death-ridden dark, Martha had realized, even at the time, that she would never know such happiness again.

"You shouldn't!" she sometimes said to Basil as she came out of the tube station into his waiting arms. "You shouldn't! You should stop up West, it's safer up there." But always he just laughed, as of course she had known he would.

"Don't worry, love!" he would answer, his strong arms encircling her in the savage dark. "Don't worry, I'm as safe here as I'd be anywhere. What I always say is, if it's got your number on it, you'll get it, no matter *where* you are."

How wrong he was!

She was nearing the top of the stairs now. Faint gleams of blueish light from the ticket office were beginning to play dimly on the curve of the wall, and she was becoming aware of sounds from the outside world. The crackle of gunfire; the clatter of a warden's boots, running; and in the ensuing silence, she became aware of a tension, a sense of approaching climax, which was the only memory she had of that last night. The only *clear* memory, anyway—the rest had been a blur of all-enveloping horror. What *had* happened, exactly?

She had been nearing the top of these spiral steps, she remembered, just as she was now—the lifts were always put out of action as soon as the sirens went on, and so climbing up these spiral stairs when she came home from work had become a familiar routine.

Yes, she had been just at the top of the flight, just coming out into the station entrance, when she had known, suddenly, that something was going to happen. She didn't know how she knew, for there was no sound, no explosion, no ominous whistling of an approaching bomb.

She learned afterward that when a bomb is coming *really* near, right on top of you, you don't hear the whistling. But she didn't know this at the time. All she was aware of in those last moments before the end was a peculiar, waiting stillness. The whole sky seemed to be leaning outward, somehow, the air was opening out silently, like a flower, and then a voice—the ticket collector it must have been—was screaming at her.

"Get down! Get down!" he had yelled, pushing her back.

But he couldn't have forced her back if she hadn't let him. Already she had glimpsed Basil running across the street toward her, and she could, if she had chosen, have run forward to meet him, not back into the safety of the stairs.

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But back, in fact, she had run; down and down, round and round, spiraling down, down, down into safety, while outside the earth rocked to such an explosion as she had never dreamed, and that her mind could not grasp. Her ears were deafened and her mind was blacked out, and afterward she could remember almost nothing of how it had been.

People were very kind. "How dreadfully sad!" they said, and "You mustn't reproach yourself, there was nothing you could have done to save him." And of course they were right.

Or were they? How could they *know?* How could *anyone* know? If just one person, once, in the whole history of the world, had done just one thing differently from the way he or she in fact had done it, who could say that it wouldn't have changed the whole future of mankind? Who could tell whether, if Martha had run forward toward Basil instead of backward into safety—who could tell if, locked in each other's arms, they might not have had one of those miraculous escapes, some bizarre fluke of blast hurling them somehow into safety? *One read of such things. Who could tell? Who can ever,* anywhere, say with certainty what *would* have happened *if . . .*

If she had pushed past the well-meaning ticket man. *If* she had defied all her own instincts of self-preservation. *If* she had raced out into the black jaws of death, crying "Basil! Basil! I'm here!"

"Ticket, please."

Martha stared, stupidly, as the man at the barrier waited, hand outstretched. Outside, the commonplace light of peacetime gleamed on the wet streets, and she could feel the weight of her fifty-five years in every limb.

"I—I'm sorry," she muttered, fumbling in her bag, searching, trying to remember if she had even bought one.

Soon, though, the small fuss was over—she could tell from the man's bored, patronizing manner that he wasn't going to honor with serious reproof such an idiot criminal as this—one who didn't even know which station she'd got on at, let alone which station she was at now. So he shrugged, charged her twenty p., and let her go out into the wet alien night, thirty years and more away from home.

She was late getting home, of course, just as she had feared, and Leonard was angry. He was angrier still when, later that evening, the store manager phoned him about the dress. The man was less apologetic this time about bothering so important a person as Leonard, and less inclined to hush the whole thing up.

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"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but I'm afraid it can't go on. Yes, I know you always see to it that we get the goods back or pay for it, and—yes, yes, I know, but that's not quite the point, is it? I do appreciate your position, and you have my sympathy, but all the same next time I'm afraid it will be my duty . . ."

Martha, listening in on the bedroom extension, heard her husband slam down the receiver, and she waited, crouched against the pillows, for the familiar storm to break. Leonard's face, as he entered the bedroom, was angrier than she could ever remember.

It came to an end, though, at last. Even the most blazing row cannot go on forever. It ended, as it always did, with Martha in tears and making hysterical promises never to do it again.

But this time, with a sort of weary contempt in his voice that Martha had never heard before, Leonard extracted from her a further promise—not merely never to do it again, but actually never to go shopping by herself again.

"Do you understand, Martha? You can go into town only if someone will go with you—your sister, or one of your bridge friends—but you are *not* to go to the West End shops by yourself any more. Do you understand?"

And Martha, still sniffling, said she did. She promised to do exactly as he said, and the next morning, the moment he had left the flat, she set off for the West End.

Not for the shops, though. Oh, no, she had an errand now a thousand times more important than going to any shop, and a thousand times more exciting. Somehow, somewhere, she must find once more the magic tube station, the gateway into the world of her youth, the world where she belonged, the only place where she had ever truly lived.

It must be somewhere! All that day—and the next, and the next—she traveled up and down the Central Line, getting out at this station and at that, randomly, but nowhere could she find the station of her dreams.

She did not despair. It *must* be somewhere, it *must*. Perhaps the magic only worked if you got on at the right station as well as getting off at the right one. Which station *had* she got on at that fateful night? Oxford Circus? Bond Street? Marble Arch? It might be any of them—or even Tottenham Court Road, or Holborn.

This added alarmingly to the possible permutations and combinations, but Martha was not disheartened. Each evening, when she got home from her fruitless search, she would lock herself in her

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room and plan out her next day's itinerary: start from Marble Arch this time and get off at Bow; then back to Marble Arch and start again, this time getting off at East Ham.

Leonard noticed the strange, furtive eagerness about her these days, the secret purposefulness, and at first it worried him. But as the days went by and there were still no phone calls from any of the stores, he began to relax. Perhaps, after all, she was keeping her promise. Perhaps she had even reformed.

It was at the end of the third week that the call came, and when with weary dread he picked up the phone it wasn't a store manager on the line at all. It was the police. His wife, they were sorry to tell him, had been killed in an accident just outside Mile End Station. A quite extraordinary accident—at the moment, it all seemed quite impossible to explain—

It remained impossible to explain. Police, doctors, forensic experts were all equally at a loss. What sort of vehicle could it have been, and traveling at what sort of speed, to have inflicted the extraordinary injuries sustained by the deceased?

There seemed to be no clues at all. And of all the people who must have been present at the time of the accident—it was during the evening rush hour—only one came forward as a witness, the ticket collector at Mile End Station. And, really, he might as well have saved himself the trouble, so nonsensical was the story he had to tell and so unhelpful to the serious investigation that was being undertaken.

On the night of the tragedy, he claimed, he had noticed this woman coming up off the train. She was plump, middle-aged, in no way remarkable; and the only reason he had noticed her was that she was running at top speed right toward the barrier. Thinking she was trying to get through without a ticket, he had reached out and grabbed her arm. Accustomed though he was to fare-dodgers of all sorts, he had been amazed by the violence of her struggles.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she had screamed. "It's got my number on it!"

Thinking she must be referring to some sort of season ticket or special pass, he had relaxed his grip for a moment, expecting her to produce such a document; and in that split second she had broken free, charged through the barrier, and was out into the street.

And then? Well, all he could say was what he had actually seen

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with his own eyes, let them make of it what they could. As the woman ran, still at full speed, across the pavement outside the station, she had fallen in pieces. Yes, in pieces.

No, nothing had hit her. She hadn't tripped or stumbled. She had simply fallen in pieces while he watched. Her whole body had quietly disintegrated into a dozen bits that scattered this way and that across the pavement.

And from this statement the ticket collector would not budge.

The police could make nothing of it. And poor Leonard, when he arrived on the scene, was just as baffled. Lawyer though he was, he didn't even make a very good job of identifying the body. It should have been easy for him, because, as it chanced, the head and face had escaped all damage.

"I—I suppose it must be her," he said slowly, staring down at the familiar features.

Familiar, and yet wholly unfamiliar. As he gazed into his wife's dead face, Leonard wondered, in his clear, precise, legal mind, where all that beauty had been hidden during their marriage, and all that happiness on her face.

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THE DEVIL AND HIS DUE

by DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS

Thomas MacIntosh Gordon III was learning a great deal about the devil, especially for someone about to turn fifteen. He had chosen as his subject for a Religious Studies term paper, "The Devil and All His Works." The reason he chose the devil—as opposed to such possibilities as St. Francis of Assisi (at least four of his classmates chose St. Francis), the Augustinian Hermits, the Spanish Inquisition, Savonarola, or John Knox—was the premonition of boredom as he pondered them. His religious instructor sanctioned his choice for the same reason: there was no more disruptive influence at St. Christopher's Preparatory School in east Manhattan than Thomas MacIntosh Gordon III when he was bored.

Thomas had to have special letters from both the school and his parents in order to gain access to the rare books he wished to see at the New York Public Library and the Morgan Library. The permissions having been granted at the top, the staffs extended him the privileges of a scholar. He accepted gravely and concentrated with all his might. But sometimes, to ease the feeling of gravity, he would stop off at one or another of the Fifth Avenue bookstores to search out more modern literature giving the devil his due. Most of it couldn't hold a candle to the ancients, but one day, at Glasgow's, he discovered something that quite enchanted him—an exquisitely illustrated new edition of Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony.*

There remained until this time, which was not so very long ago, a cozy, old-world atmosphere to Glasgow's. Customers and non-customers alike browsed undisturbed by the sales personnel. A few were disconcerted now and then by the cold eye of Frank O'Reilly, the store detective. He retired last year and uniformed security guards took over, putting an end to an era as well as to a man's career.

Frank was not popular on the floor. To him every browser was a potential thief, and according to Miss Murray, whose seniority equaled Frank's, he had scared off more buyers over the years than

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thieves. His eyes glowing, his breath a mixture of whiskey and cloves, he pushed among the customers like a pouter pigeon, bumping them out of his way rather than lose sight of a subject under surveillance. Many an order was abandoned on the way to the cash register because of Frank, and the story is told of the time Miss Murray turned on him after one such abortion and flung every book in the order at his head. Frank stood his ground stoutly, merely removing his bowler hat to protect it under his arm.

There were not many customers in the store when Frank first noticed Thomas. The boy caught his attention by glancing slyly around to see if anyone was watching him. Frank dropped his eyes before Thomas's reached them. When Thomas went back to the book, Frank sized him up: a well dressed, sassy-looking lad, small for his age, no doubt, given to reading in corners when he should have been on the football field. Cunning, too, Frank decided. He wore a private-school blazer and a cap. He'd have money in his pocket, which would only reinforce his larcenous impulses. He put Frank in mind of the youngsters old Mr. Glasgow had used to hire when he was running the store; he required only that they came of good family and had passed their sixteenth birthday, and he wouldn't have cared about that except for the law. The union shop put an end to the practice.

Frank sidled down the aisle and surreptitiously glimpsed the book the youngster was into—drawings of nude women and the horny heads of animals among them. For a respectable bookstore, Glasgow's had some of the damndest things right out where any school child could feast his greedy little eyes on them. There'd be a hot time in the locker room if he popped something like that out of his duffelbag, and if he could boast of having snitched it—what an example to his chums! It would be far better for the boy in the long run to be caught in the theft of it. And not bad for Frank O'Reilly, to whom a little thief was better than none. He retreated to the Sports and Wildlife section and took up his vigil, rather like a hunter in the blind.

Bradford Pope observed the scene from the balcony, where he was waiting for old Glasgow to come with the key. Pope had the look of the diplomatic service about him—a European cut to his clothes, a school tie you felt you ought to recognize, and shoes polished to a gloss. He wore his greying hair in a crest to camouflage a barren stretch of scalp. His hand dangled languorously over the railing, and his dark eyes, while quick, were limpid.

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When the boy looked up at him, he smiled, meaning to convey a knowing sympathy. What he wanted was the boy to stay where he was and to continue to hold the security man's attention, something the boy seemed quite unaware of. The youngster blushed guiltily and averted his eyes. Pope was delighted; he had been about the boy's age himself when he stole his first book.

Mr. Glasgow came along in that brisk, gingerly step of the aging wherein they resemble tightrope walkers—which, indeed, they are. He no longer owned any part of Glasgow's, but he had been allowed to stay on and write his memoirs while presiding over what was left of the once-famous Old and Rare Department. He knew very well that he and Old and Rare would go out of Glasgow's together.

"I knew you'd come back, Mr. Bishop," he said. "Matter of fact, I had my secretary make out the authentication when you left me Friday."

"Pope. Bradford Pope, Mr. Glasgow."

"Yes, of course, as in Alexander." Mr. Glasgow selected his key from a ring chained to his belt. "I don't suppose you'd be interested in an 1866 copy of *Satires and Epistles?*"

Pope shook his head regretfully.

"Pity." The old man proceeded to one of the finely crafted glass-doored cases with which the balcony was lined at the turn of the century when Glasgow's moved uptown from lower Broadway.

Pope hung back until the case was opened. "Mr. Glasgow?" He beckoned him to the balcony rail and pointed out Thomas MacIntosh Gordon. "I may be wrong, but I suspect that lad is about to steal a book."

Mr. Glasgow leaned over the rail and scouted the floor until he spotted Frank O'Reilly. "Hadn't better," he said. Then, with an appraising look at Thomas: "Bright-looking chap, isn't he? In my day, we put his sort to work. Didn't stop their thieving, but we got something in return."

Pope had thought he'd have more time. He regretted the banality of the next ploy and delayed it by a second or two, saying, "But isn't it reassuring in these times that someone his age cares enough about a book to want to steal it?"

Mr. Glasgow gave a dry grunt of assent.

"Excuse me, sir, but your shoelace is untied." Pope dropped to one knee at the old man's feet and pulled the lace loose before Mr. Glasgow realized what he was about. "Get up from there! I'm not so feeble that I can't tie my own laces!"

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Pope retreated toward the open case. "No offense, Mr. Glasgow," he said almost obsequiously.

"None taken." But the old face, still handsome despite the sagging, quivering jowls, was flushed. He lifted his foot, straining to conceal the effort, and planted it on the rail. He tied a double knot while he was about it.

Pope, knowing exactly where the book he wanted was, deftly plucked it from the shelf and slipped it into a pouch at his waist. It was a slender volume containing Richard Hooker's life of Izaak Walton, an extraordinary find, published within fifty years of Hooker's own lifetime. It would bring him thousands if he waited a bit. Or took sufficient care in making up a provenance. He leaped forward and caught the old gentleman's elbow when he teetered, off balance. Mr. Glasgow shrugged off his assistance, returned to the bookcase, and got out the Leyden edition of an Eighteenth Century medical handbook—it was the item they had discussed and bargained over on Pope's last visit.

"I've often wondered," Pope said the while, "why the Pilgrims pulled out of Leyden when they did. It's a mystery that's never been satisfactorily solved, you know."

"Won't find out here." The old man chortled and waved the medical handbook.

The moment Pope had smiled at him, Thomas knew the man was up to no good. He half expected to be sneakily beckoned up the stairs and hustled into some secret passage behind the bookshelves. Which was why he had looked away so quickly. He had been thoroughly instructed in how to repulse such an overture. But when the old man also came to the railing and Thomas felt himself the object of both their attentions, he wondered if Pope might not be a truant officer. People were always asking Thomas why he wasn't in school. He had composed several answers: "Don't you know it's St. Crispin's Day?" Or, "Madam, I've been expelled for promiscuity." None of which he had ever used.

He returned to paging *The Temptation of St. Anthony*. The fact was, he was having trouble with his project: the devil had too many works. It occurred to Thomas he might more easily contain his subject if he approached the devil from the viewpoint of St. Anthony.

Miss Murray wandered down the aisle and rearranged a stack of books across the table from Thomas. She had in mind to discourage

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this youngster if he intended mischief, which, plainly, Frank O'Reilly anticipated. Frank shook his fist at her when she threw him a hypocritical smile. A customer, waiting at the cash register, asked if someone in the store wouldn't mind taking his money. Miss Murray hastened back to her station.

Thomas opened the briefcase at his feet and took out pen and notebook. He carefully wrote down the title and author of the book that he might add it to his references. He also noted dates of publication and copyright, the text dated 1910. That set him to wondering just how Flaubert came to know what happened to St. Anthony, who had lived in the Fourth Century. Flaubert had made it up, of course, which set Thomas to further thought on whether it might not be a sin to make up such things about a saint. He'd thought before about the viewpoint of St. Anthony. Flaubert, he decided, was a hypocrite, pretending to write about St. Anthony when what he really wanted to write about was the devil.

Thomas jumped when the phone rang on the post behind him. The woman clerk came and identified herself as Miss Murray. "Yes, Mr. Glasgow," she said. "I'll be waiting for him."

Thomas followed her eyes to the top of the balcony stairs. There stood the man he had suspected of flirting with him. Very shortly he was joined by the old gentleman.

Mr. Glasgow had brought the Leyden book and its authentication along with the bill of sale, which Miss Murray would process when Pope got downstairs. The two men shook hands. Pope had with him a certified check for $1,512—it had all but cleaned him out. He ran down the steps, paused there, and saluted the old gentleman watching at the top. As soon as Miss Murray took over, Mr. Glasgow retreated to his nook among the executive offices.

Pope, to expand his air of casualness, pretended, in passing, an interest in the book which so absorbed Thomas. Thomas looked up at him icily. "Why aren't you in school?" Pope asked.

"Because I have the mumps," Thomas said.

Pope pulled in his neck, as it were.

Miss Murray, seeing the figure of Pope's purchase which, no matter how Bookkeeping dealt with it eventually, would appear with her initials on that day's register tape, began to hum to conceal her excitement. She made a mistake in punching the first digit and had to correct.

"Miss Murray," Pope said, "hold on a moment, will you?"

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Miss Murray remained crouched over the electronic keys, her fingers poised.

Pope moistened his lips. He was about to violate one of his basic rules: don't get greedy. But the setup was irresistible. The youngster was putting something in his briefcase and the security officer, unnoticed by the boy, was so intent on him that he was actually on tiptoe, ready to take off after the youngster when he headed for the exit.

"I'm frightfully sorry if it's an inconvenience," Pope said, affecting a British accent, which usually ingratiated him with elderly saleswomen, "but, you know, I'd like another day to consider. I'm sure Mr. Glasgow will understand."

"I'm sure he will," Miss Murray said, shooting her teeth at him. The following day was her day off. She cleared the register, then locked it, tucked the invoice and the documentation within the book's cover, and left the floor to take the book back to Mr. Glasgow.

Thomas hadn't missed a step. He had already decided to follow the man out of the store on the chance of his committing himself to something not yet defined in Thomas's imagination. Thomas only knew that the man was wicked, a conviction best accounted for by his recent studies.

Pope waited until Miss Murray was almost up the stairs, then ambled into the Sculpture Department. It was a direct line from there to the Fifth Avenue exit. He gradually accelerated his pace.

Thomas grabbed his briefcase and ran after him, at which point every customer in the store, most of them in the Fifth Avenue wing, became aware that something was happening.

Frank O'Reilly was momentarily off balance, shocked at Miss Murray's leaving the floor without a word or a sign to him. He was sure that it was pure cantankerousness, her trying to prove that, left on his honor, the little savage would turn noble. The little savage, having dropped something into his briefcase, was galloping through Sculpture with it. Frank took a short cut behind the stairs. Up front, a woman screamed, "Stop, thief!"

There was one in every crowd, Frank thought, someone doing his work for him. He could not make an arrest until the suspect got beyond the store.

As soon as Thomas heard the cry, "Stop, thief!" he put things together approximately right, dead right in the conclusion that the man was on his way out of the store with a book he had stolen from

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the Old and Rare Department. Thomas paused long enough to call out to a clerk, "Call a policeman!"

"The store detective's right behind you, sonny."

"Thanks," O'Reilly said bitterly. There wasn't a clerk in the store who wasn't his enemy.

Thomas sprinted ahead. He caught up with Pope in the revolving door, hitting the door with enough force to send the unready thief reeling past the exit. O'Reilly, in the compartment behind Thomas, held the door back at that point, hoping to flush the boy outdoors: all he had to do was go, he was in the open. But Thomas had no intention of letting the thief get out of his sight. Pope was hung up like a bird in a glass cage.

Finally, Pope braced himself, his back to the panel next to Thomas, and pushed. O'Reilly, surmising what he had in mind, yielded and the door slipped back a few inches: Pope was able to slither outdoors. He immediately collared Thomas and pulled him into the street, where he delivered him into the detective's arms. He then intended to lose himself in the crowd that was gathering as though drawn by a magnet.

Thomas was not to be held. He wheeled his briefcase over his head and brought it up full force into O'Reilly's midriff. Frank let go of him, and Thomas threw a flying tackle at Pope. He got him by the knees and brought him down. He hung on until Frank plucked him off and gave him over to the temporary custody of two willing bystanders. Frank helped Pope to his feet. Pope was swearing he would sue Glasgow's for the youngster's assault.

"You're as fine as new," Frank said heartily and brushed the dust of the street from Pope's suit. Thus did his hand come in contact with something that was unmistakably a book, and in a place no man would ordinarily abide anything foreign to his person. Frank knew instantly he had caught a thief in spite of himself. When he saw Mr. Glasgow and Miss Murray conveying one another through the revolving door, he caught onto the fact that the book must belong to Old and Rare. He clapped his hand on Pope's shoulder and pronounced a solemn arrest.

"Well done, Frank!" Mr. Glasgow cried. He had discovered the Richard Hooker missing when he returned the medical handbook to the shelf.

Pope surrendered the book. His one consolation was that he still had the certified check—at least he could post bail.

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Mr. Glasgow noticed Thomas and remembered Pope's using him as a cunning decoy. "And the little ruffian—you got him, too!"

"Me?" Thomas said, a squeak.

His captors took a tighter hold.

Pope, knowing to whom he owed his captivity, said in his best Cockney, " 'Is name is Oliver," and bared his teeth at Thomas in a sardonic grin.

"My name is Thomas MacIntosh Gordon, Third," Thomas declared loudly, so that several people in the crowd whistled mockingly.

"Best let the boy go," Frank whispered to the man he still considered his employer. "We don't have much on him."

"I knew his grandfather," Mr. Glasgow said. "Or was it his great grandfather? Shipbuilders. Started in the Clipper days—the *Mary Ellen*, if I'm not mistaken."

At a sign from O'Reilly, Thomas's captors set him free. He gathered his briefcase and his cap and said with haughty scorn, "You will hear from my lawyers."

Thomas never doubted that the devil had had a hand in what happened to him that day at Glasgow's. He was therefore the more determined to get on with his term paper, and certainly not to yield to the all but overwhelming temptation to switch subjects. He considered it a moral victory the day he turned the paper in. But that term Thomas, to whom straight A's were a commonplace, got the first C-minus of his academic career. In Religious Studies.

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SLOWLY, SLOWLY IN THE WIND

by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

Edward (Skip) Skipperton spent most of his life in a thunderous rage. It was his nature. He had been full of temper as a boy, and as a man impatient with people's slowness or stupidity or inefficiency. Now Skipperton was fifty-two. His wife had left him two years ago, unable to stand his tantrums any longer. She had met a tranquil university professor from Boston, had divorced Skipperton on the grounds of incompatibility, and married the professor. Skipperton had been determined to get custody of his daughter Margaret, then fifteen, and with clever lawyers and on the grounds that his wife had deserted him for another man, Skipperton had succeeded.

A few months after the divorce, Skipperton had a heart attack, a real stroke with hemi-paralysis from which he miraculously recovered in six months, but his doctors warned him. "Skip, it's life or death. You quit smoking and drinking and right now, or you're a dead man before your next birthday." That was from his heart specialist.

"You owe it to Margaret," said his G.P. "You ought to retire, Skip. You've plenty of money. You're in the wrong profession for your nature—granted you've made a success of it. But what's left of your life is more important, isn't it? Why not become a gentleman farmer, something like that?"

Skipperton was a management advisor. Behind the scenes of big business Skipperton was well known. He worked as a freelance. Companies on the brink sent for him to reorganize, reform, throw out—anything Skip advised went. "I go in and kick the behind off 'em!" was the inelegant way Skip described his work when he was interviewed, which was not often, because he preferred a ghostly role.

Skipperton bought Coldstream Heights in Maine, a seven-acre farm with a modernized farmhouse, and hired a local man named Andy Humbert to live and work on the place. Skipperton also bought some of the machinery from the former owner, but not all of it, because he didn't want to turn himself into a full-time farmer.

The doctors had recommended a little exercise, but no strain of any kind. They had known that Skip wouldn't and couldn't cut all his connections with the businesses he had helped in the past. He might have

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to make an occasional trip to Chicago or Dallas, but officially he was retired.

Margaret was transferred from her private school in New York to a Swiss boarding school. Skipperton knew and liked Switzerland, and had bank accounts there.

Skipperton did stop drinking and smoking. His doctors were amazed at his will power—and yet it was just like Skip to stop drinking and smoking overnight, like a soldier. Now Skip chewed his pipes, and bit through a stem in a week. He went through two lower teeth, but got them capped in steel in Bangor.

Skipperton and Andy kept a couple of goats to crop the grass, and one sow who was pregnant when Skip bought her, and who now had twelve piglets. Margaret wrote filial letters saying she liked Switzerland and that her French was improving no end. Skipperton now wore flannel shirts with no tie, low boots that laced, and woodsmen's jackets. His appetite had improved, and he had to admit he felt better.

The only thorn in his side—and Skipperton had to have one to feel normal—was the man who owned some adjacent land, one Peter Frosby, who wouldn't sell a stretch Skipperton offered to buy at three times the market price. This land sloped down to a little river called the Coldstream, which in fact separated part of Skipperton's property from Frosby's to the north, and Skipperton didn't mind that. He was interested in the part of the river nearest him and in view from Coldstream Heights.

Skipperton wanted to be able to fish a little, to be able to say he owned that part of the landscape and had riparian rights. But old Frosby didn't want anybody fishing in his stream, Skipperton had been told by the agents, even though Frosby's house was upstream and out of sight of Skipperton's.

The week after Peter Frosby's rejection, Skipperton invited Frosby to his house. "Just to get acquainted—as neighbors," Skipperton said on the telephone to Frosby. By now Skipperton had been living at Coldstream Heights for four months.

Skipperton had on hand his best whiskey and brandy, cigars and cigarettes—all the things he couldn't enjoy himself—when Frosby arrived in a dusty but new Cadillac, driven by a young man whom Frosby introduced as his son Peter.

"The Frosbys don't sell their land," Frosby told Skipperton. "We've had the same land for nearly three hundred years, and the river's always been ours." Frosby, a skinny but strong-looking man with cold

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grey eyes, puffed his cigar daintily and after ten minutes hadn't finished his first whiskey. "Can't see why you want it."

"A little fishing," Skipperton said, putting on a pleasant smile. "It's in view of my house. Just to be able to wade, maybe, in the summer."

Skipperton looked at Peter Junior, who sat with folded arms beside and behind his father. Skipperton was backed only by shambly Andy, a good enough handyman, but not part of his dynasty. Skipperton would have given anything—except his life—to have been holding a straight whiskey in one hand and a good cigar in the other. "Well, I'm sorry," he said finally. "But I think you'll agree the price I offer isn't bad—twenty thousand cash for about two hundred yards of riparian rights. Doubt if you'll get it again—in your lifetime."

"Not interested in my lifetime," Frosby said with a faint smile. "I've got a son here."

The son was a handsome boy with dark hair and sturdy shoulders, taller than his father. His arms were still folded across his chest, as if to illustrate his father's negative attitude. He had unbent only briefly to light a cigarette which he had soon put out. Still, Peter Junior smiled as he and his father were leaving and said, "Nice job you've done with the Heights, Mr. Skipperton. Looks better than it did before."

"Thank you," Skip said, pleased. He had installed good leather-upholstered furniture, heavy floor-length curtains, and brass firedogs and tongs for the fireplace.

"Nice old-fashioned touches," Frosby commented in what seemed to Skipperton a balance between compliment and sneer. "We haven't seen a scarecrow around here in maybe—almost before my time, I think."

"I like old-fashioned things—like fishing," Skipperton said. "I'm trying to grow corn out there. Somebody told me the land was all right for corn. That's where a scarecrow belongs, isn't it? In a cornfield?"

He put on as friendly a manner as he could, but his blood was boiling. A mule-stubborn Maine man, Frosby, sitting on several hundred acres that his more forceful ancestors had acquired for him.

Frosby Junior was peering at a photograph of Maggie, which stood in a silver frame on the hall table. She had been only thirteen or fourteen when the picture had been taken, but her slender face framed in long dark hair showed the clean-cut nose and brows, the subtle smile that would turn her into a beauty one day. Maggie was nearly eighteen now and Skip's expectations of her beauty were being confirmed.

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"Pretty girl," said Frosby Junior, turning toward Skipperton, then glancing at his father, because they were all lingering in the hall.

Skipperton said nothing. The meeting had been a failure, and Skipperton wasn't used to failures. He looked into Frosby's greenish-grey eyes and said, "I've one more idea. Suppose we make an arrangement that I rent the land for the duration of my life and then it goes back to you—or your son. I'll give you five thousand a year. Want to think it over?"

Frosby put on another frosty smile. "I think not, Mr. Skipperton. Thanks, anyway."

"You might talk to your lawyer about it. No rush on my part."

Frosby chuckled. "We know as much about law as the lawyers here. We know our boundaries, anyway. Nice to meet you, Mr. Skipperton. Thank you for the whiskey and—goodbye."

No one shook hands. The Cadillac moved off.

"Damn the jerk," Skipperton muttered to Andy, but he smiled. Life was a game, after all. You won sometimes, you lost sometimes.

It was early May. The corn was in, and Skipperton had spotted three or four strong green shoots coming through the beige, well-turned earth. That pleased him, made him think of American Indians, the ancient Mayans. Corn! And he had a classic scarecrow that he and Andy had knocked together a couple of weeks ago. They had dressed the crossbars in an old jacket, and the two sticks—nailed to the upright—in brown trousers. Skip had found the old clothes in the attic. A straw hat jammed onto the top and secured with a nail completed the picture.

Skip went off to San Francisco for a five-day assignment for an aeronautics firm which was crippled by a lawsuit and scared to death by unions and contract pullouts. Skip left them with three vice-presidents fired but in better financial shape, and collected a $50,000 fee for his work.

By way of celebrating his achievement and the oncoming summer that would bring Maggie, Skip shot one of Frosby's hunting dogs which had swum the stream onto Skip's property to retrieve a bird. Skipperton had been waiting patiently at his bedroom window upstairs, knowing a shoot was on from the sound of guns. He had his binoculars and a rifle of goodly range. Let Frosby complain! Trespassing was trespassing.

Skip was almost pleased when Frosby took him to court over the

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dog. Andy had buried the dog on Skipperton's orders, but Skipperton readily admitted the shooting. And the judge ruled in his favor.

Frosby went pale with anger. "It may be the law but it's not human. It's not fair."

And a lot of good it did Frosby to say that!

Skipperton's corn grew high as the scarecrow's hips, and higher. Skip spent a lot of time up in his bedroom, binoculars and loaded rifle at hand, in case anything else belonging to Frosby showed up on his land.

"Don't hit me," Andy said with an uneasy laugh. "You're shooting on the edge of the cornfield there, and now and then I weed it, y'know."

"You think there's something wrong with my eyesight?" Skip replied.

A few days later, Skip proved there was nothing wrong with his eyesight when he plugged a grey cat stalking a bird or a field mouse in the high grass this side of the stream. Skip did it with one shot. He wasn't even sure the cat belonged to Frosby.

This shot produced a call in person from Frosby Junior the following day.

"It's just to ask a question, Mr. Skipperton. My father and I heard a shot yesterday, and last night one of our cats didn't come back at night to eat—and not this morning, either. Do you know anything about that?" Frosby Junior had declined to take a seat.

"I shot the cat. It was on my property," Skipperton said calmly.

"But a cat—what harm was the cat doing?" The young man looked steadily at Skipperton.

"The law is the law. Property is property."

Frosby Junior shook his head. "You're a hard man, Mr. Skipperton." Then he departed.

Peter Frosby served a summons again, and the same judge ruled that in accordance with old English law and also American law, a cat was a rover by nature, not subject to constraint as was a dog. He gave Skipperton the maximum fine of $100, and a warning not to use his rifle so freely in the future.

That annoyed Skipperton, though of course he could and did laugh at the smallness of the fine. If he could think of something else, something really *telling*, old Frosby might relent and at least rent some of the stream, Skip thought.

But he forgot the feud when Margaret came. Skip fetched her at the airport in New York, and they drove up to Maine. She looked

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taller to Skip, more filled out, and there were roses in her cheeks. She was a beauty, all right.

"Got a surprise for you at home," Skip said.

"Um-m—a horse maybe? I told you I learned to jump this year, didn't I?"

Had she? Skip said, "Yes. Not a horse, no."

Skip's surprise was a red sports car. He had remembered at least that Maggie's school had taught her to drive. She was thrilled and flung her arms around his neck.

"You're a darling, Daddy! And you know, you're looking *very* well!"

By Easter, Margaret had been to Coldstream Heights for two weeks, but now the place looked more cared for. She and Skip had arrived around midnight, but Andy was still up watching television in his own little house on the grounds, and Maggie insisted on going over to greet him. Skip was gratified to see Andy's eyes widen at the sight of her.

Skip and Maggie tried out the new car the next day. They drove to a town twenty miles away and had lunch. That afternoon, back at the house, Maggie asked if her father had a fishing rod, just a simple one, so she could try the stream. Skip of course had all kinds of rods, but he had to tell her she couldn't fish, and he explained why, and that he had even tried to rent part of the stream.

"Frosby's a real mule," Skip said. "Won't give an inch."

"Well, never mind, Daddy. There's lots else to do."

Maggie was the kind of girl who enjoyed taking walks, reading, or fussing around in the house, rearranging little things so they would look prettier. She did these things while Skip was on the telephone sometimes for an hour or so with Dallas or Detroit.

Skipperton was a bit surprised one day when Maggie arrived in her car around seven P.M. with a catch of three trout on a string. She was barefoot and the cuffs of her blue dungarees were damp. "Where'd you get those?" Skip asked, his first thought being that she'd taken one of his rods and fished the stream against his instructions.

"I met the boy who lives there," Maggie said. "We were both buying gas, and he introduced himself—said he'd seen my photograph in this house. Then we had a coffee in the diner there by the gas station."

"The Frosby boy?"

"Yes. He's awfully nice, Daddy. Maybe it's only the father who's not nice. Anyway, Pete said, 'Come on and fish with me this afternoon,' so I did. He said his father stocks the river farther up."

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"I don't—frankly, Maggie, I *don't* want you associating with the Frosbys!"

"There are only two." Maggie was puzzled. "I barely met his father. They've got quite a nice house, Daddy."

"I've had unpleasant dealings with old Frosby, as I told you, Maggie. It just isn't fitting if you get chummy with the son. Do me this one favor this summer, Maggie doll." That was his name for her in the moments he wanted to feel close to her, wanted her to feel close to him.

Maggie was silent for a few seconds. Then she said, "All right, Daddy."

The next day Maggie was gone from the house for nearly three hours, and Skip noticed it. She had said she wanted to go to the village to buy sneakers, and she was wearing the sneakers when she came home, but Skip wondered why it had taken her three hours to make a five-mile trip. With enormous effort, he refrained from asking a question. Then Saturday morning Maggie said there was a dance in Keensport, and she was going.

"And I have a suspicion who you're going with," Skip said, his heart beginning to thump with adrenalin.

"I'm going alone, I swear it, Daddy. Girls don't have to be escorted any more. I could go in blue jeans, but I'm not. I've got some white slacks."

Skipperton realized that he could hardly forbid her to go to a dance, even alone. But he damn well knew the Frosby boy would be there, and would probably meet Maggie at the entrance. "I'll be glad when you go back to Switzerland."

Skip knew what was going to happen. He could see it a mile away. His daughter was infatuated, and he could only hope that she got over it, that nothing happened before she had to go back to school in another month, because he didn't want to keep her prisoner in the house. He didn't want to look absurd in his own eyes, even in simpleminded Andy's eyes, by laying down the law to her.

Maggie got home very late that night, and so quietly that Skip hadn't wakened, though he had stayed up till two A.M. and meant to listen for her. At breakfast Maggie looked fresh and radiant, rather to Skip's surprise.

"I suppose the Frosby boy was at the dance last night?"

Maggie, diving into bacon and eggs, said, "I don't know what you've got against him, Daddy—just because his father didn't want to sell land that's been in their family for ages."

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"I don't want you to fall in love with a country bumpkin! I've sent you to a good school. You've got background—or at least I intend to give you some!"

"Did you know Pete had three years at Harvard—and he's taking a correspondence course in electronic engineering?"

"Oh? I suppose he's learning computer programming. Easier than shorthand!"

Maggie stood up. "I'll be eighteen in another month, Daddy. I don't want to be told whom I can see and can't see."

Skip got up, too, and roared at her. "They're not my kind of people or yours!"

Maggie left the room.

In the next few days Skipperton fumed and went through three pipestems. Andy noticed his unease, Skipperton knew, but Andy made no comment. Andy spent his nonworking hours alone, watching drivel on his television. Skip was rehearsing a speech to Maggie as he paced his land, glancing at the sow and piglets, at Andy's neat kitchen garden, not seeing anything. Skip was groping for a lever, the kind of weapon he had always been able to find in business affairs, that would force this his way.

He couldn't send Maggie back to Switzerland, even though her school stayed open in summer for girls whose homes were too far away to go back to. If he threatened not to send her back to school, he was afraid she wouldn't mind. Skipperton maintained an apartment in New York, and had two servants who slept in, but he knew Maggie wouldn't agree to go there, and Skip didn't want to go to New York, either. He was too interested in the immediate scene, in which he sensed a battle coming.

Skipperton had arrived at nothing by the following Saturday, a week after the Keensport dance, and he was exhausted. That Saturday evening Maggie said she was going to a party at the house of someone called Wilmers, whom she had met at the dance. Skip asked her for the address and Maggie scribbled it on the hall telephone pad. Skip had reason to have asked for it, because by Sunday morning Maggie hadn't come home. Skip was up at seven, nervous as a cat and still in a rage at nine A.M., which he thought a polite enough hour to telephone on a Sunday morning, though it had cost him much to wait that long.

An adolescent boy's voice said that Maggie had been there, yes, but she had left pretty early.

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"Was she alone?"

"No, she was with Pete Frosby."

"That's all I wanted to know," said Skip, feeling the blood rush to his face as if he were hemorrhaging. "Oh! Wait! Do you know where they went?"

"Sure don't."

"My daughter went in her car?"

"No, Pete's. Maggie's car is still here."

Skip thanked the boy and put the phone down shakily, but he was shaking only from energy that was surging through every nerve and muscle. He picked up the telephone and dialed the Frosby home.

Old Frosby answered. Skipperton identified himself and asked if his daughter was there.

"No, she's not, Mr. Skipperton."

"Is your son there? I'd like—"

"No, he doesn't happen to be in just now."

"What do you mean? He was there and went out?"

"Mr. Skipperton, my son has his own ways, his own room, his own key—his own life. I'm not about—"

Skipperton put the telephone down suddenly. He had a bad nosebleed, and it was dripping onto the table edge. He ran to get a wet towel.

Maggie wasn't home by Sunday evening or Monday morning, and Skipperton was reluctant to notify the police, appalled by the thought that her name might be linked with the Frosbys if the police found her with the son somewhere. Tuesday morning he was enlightened. He had a letter from Maggie, written from Boston. It said that she and Peter had run away to be married, and to avoid unpleasant scenes:

"Though you may think this is sudden, we do love each other and are sure of it. I didn't really want to go back to school, Daddy. I'll be in touch in about a week. Please don't try to find me. I have seen Mommie, but we're not staying with her.

Love always,
Maggie"

For two days Skipperton didn't go out of the house, and hardly ate. He felt three-quarters dead. Andy was very worried about him, and finally persuaded Skipperton to ride to the village with him, because they needed to buy a few things. Skipperton went, sitting like an upright corpse in the passenger seat.

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While Andy went to the drugstore and the butcher's, Skipperton sat in the car, his eyes glazed with his own thoughts. Then an approaching figure on the sidewalk made Skipperton's eyes focus. Old Frosby! Frosby walked with a sprightly tread for his age, Skip thought. He wore a new tweed suit, a black-felt hat, and he had a cigar in his hand. Skipperton hoped Frosby wouldn't see him in the car, but Frosby did.

Frosby didn't pause in his stride, just smiled his obnoxious, thin-lipped little smile and nodded briefly, as if to say—

Well, Skip *knew* what Frosby might have wanted to say, what he had said with that filthy smile. Skip's blood seethed, and he began to feel like his old self again. He was standing on the sidewalk, hands in his pockets and feet apart, when Andy reappeared. "What's for dinner tonight, Andy?" he asked. "I've got an appetite!"

That evening Skipperton persuaded Andy to take not only Saturday night off, but to stay overnight somewhere if he wished. "Give you a couple of hundred bucks for a little spree, boy. You've earned it." He forced two hundred-dollar bills into Andy's hand. "Take off Monday, too, if you feel like it. I'll manage."

Andy left Saturday evening in the pickup for Bangor.

Skip then telephoned old Frosby. Frosby answered, and Skipperton said, "Mr. Frosby, it's time we made a truce, under the circumstances. Don't you think so?"

Frosby sounded surprised, but he agreed to come Sunday morning around eleven for a talk. Frosby arrived in the same Cadillac, alone.

And Skipperton wasted no time. He let Frosby knock, opened the door for him, and as soon as Frosby was inside Skip came down on his head with a rifle butt. He dragged Frosby to the hall to make sure the job was finished. The hall was uncarpeted and Skip wanted no blood on the rugs.

Vengeance was sweet to Skip and he almost smiled. He removed Frosby's clothes and wrapped his body in some burlap sacks he had ready. Then he burned Frosby's clothing in the fireplace, where he had a small fire already crackling. Frosby's wristwatch and wallet and two rings he put aside in a drawer to deal with later.

He had decided that broad daylight was the best time to carry out his idea—better than night, when the beam of a flashlight might have caught someone's eye. He put one arm around Frosby's body and dragged it up the field toward his scarecrow. It was a haul of

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more than half a mile. Skip had some rope and a knife in his back pockets.

He cut down the old scarecrow, cut the strings that held the clothing to the cross, dressed Frosby in the old trousers and jacket, tied a burlap bag around his head and face, and jammed the hat on him. The hat wouldn't stay without being tied on, so Skip did this after punching holes in the brim of the hat with the point of his knife.

Then Skip picked up his burlap bags and made his way back toward his house down the slope, with many a backward look to admire his work, and many a smile. The scarecrow looked almost the same as before. He had solved a problem that a lot of people thought difficult: how to dispose of a body. Furthermore, he could enjoy looking at it through his binoculars from his upstairs window.

Skip burned the burlap bags in his fireplace, made sure that even the soles of the shoes had burned to soft ash. When the ashes were cooler, he'd look for buttons and the belt buckle and remove them. He took a fork, went out beyond the pig run, and buried the wallet (whose papers he had already burned), the wristwatch, and the rings about three feet deep. It was in a patch of stringy grass, unused for anything except by the goats, not a place in which anyone would ever likely do any gardening.

Then Skip washed his face and hands, ate a thick slice of roast beef, and put his mind to the car. It was by now 12:30. Skip didn't know if Frosby had a servant, someone who would expect him for lunch, but it was safer to assume he had. Skip's aversion to Frosby had kept him from asking Maggie any questions about the Frosby household.

Skip got into Frosby's car, now with a kitchen towel in his back pocket to wipe off fingerprints, and drove to some woods he knew from having driven past them many times. An unpaved lane went off the main road into these woods, and into this lane Skip turned. Thank God, nobody was in sight, not a woodsman, not a picnicker. Skip stopped the car and got out, wiped the steering wheel, even the keys, then the door, and then walked back toward the road.

He was more than an hour getting home. He had found a long stick, the kind called a stave by the wayfarers of old, Skip thought, and he trudged along with the air of a nature lover, a bird-watcher, for the benefit of the people in the few cars that passed him. He didn't glance at any of the cars. It was still Sunday dinnertime.

The local police telephoned that evening around seven, and asked if they could come by. Skipperton said of course.

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He had removed the buttons and buckle from the fireplace ashes. A woman had telephoned around 1:30, saying she was calling from the Frosby residence (Skip assumed she was a servant) to ask if Mr. Frosby was there. Skipperton told her that Mr. Frosby had left his house a little after noon.

"Mr. Frosby intended to go straight home, do you think?" the plump policeman asked Skipperton. The policeman had some rank like sergeant, Skipperton supposed, and he was accompanied by a younger officer.

"He didn't say anything about where he was going," Skipperton replied. "And I didn't notice which way his car went."

The policeman nodded, and Skip could see he was on the brink of saying something like, "I understand from Mr. Frosby's housekeeper that you and he were not on the best of terms," but the cop didn't say anything, just looked around Skip's living room and glanced around his front and back yards in a puzzled way; then both policemen took their leave.

Skip was awakened around midnight by the ring of the telephone at his bedside. It was Maggie calling from Boston. She and Pete had heard about the disappearance of Pete's father.

"Daddy, they said he'd just been to see you this morning. What happened?"

"Nothing happened. I invited him for a friendly talk—and it was friendly. After all, we're fathers-in-law now. Honey, how do I know where he went?"

Skipperton found it surprisingly easy to lie about Frosby. In a primitive way, his emotions had judged, weighed the situation, and told Skip that he was right, that he had exacted a just revenge. Old Frosby might have exerted some control over his son, but he hadn't. It had cost Skip his daughter—because that was the way Skip saw it; Maggie was lost to him. He saw her as a mother-to-be of children whose narrow-mindedness, inherited from the Frosby clan, would surely out.

Andy arrived the next morning, Monday. He had already heard the story in the village, and also the police had found Mr. Frosby's car not far away in the woods, Andy said. Skip feigned mild surprise on hearing of the car. Andy didn't ask any questions. And suppose he discovered the scarecrow? Skip thought a generous amount of money would keep Andy quiet. The corn was all picked up

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there—only a few inferior ears remained, destined for the pigs. Skipperton picked them himself Monday afternoon while Andy tended the pigs and goats.

Skipperton's pleasure now was to survey the cornfield from his upstairs bedroom with his 10X binoculars. He loved to see the wind tossing the cornstalk tops around old Frosby's corpse, loved to think of him shrinking, drying up like a mummy in the wind. Twisting slowly, slowly in the wind. Frosby wasn't twisting, but he was hanging, in plain view. No buzzards came. Skip had been a little afraid of buzzards.

The only thing that bothered him, once, was seeing one afternoon some schoolboys walking along a road far to the right (under which road the Coldstream flowed), and pointing to the scarecrow. Bracing himself against the window jamb, arms held tightly at his sides so the binoculars would be as steady as possible, Skip saw a couple of the small boys laughing. And had one held his nose? Surely not! They were nearly a mile away from the scarecrow! Still, they had paused, and one boy had stamped his foot, another had shaken his head and laughed.

How Skip wished he could hear what they were saying!

Ten days had passed since Frosby's death. Rumors were rife—that old Frosby had been murdered for his money by someone he'd picked up to give a lift to, that he had been kidnaped and that a ransom note might still arrive. But suppose one of the schoolboys said to his father—or anyone—that maybe the dead body of Frosby was inside the scarecrow? This was just the kind of thing Skip might have thought of when he had been a small boy. Skip was consequently more afraid of the schoolboys than of the police.

And the police did come back, with a plainclothes detective. They looked over Skipperton's house and land—maybe looking for a recently dug patch, Skip thought. If so, they found none.

They looked at Skip's two rifles and noted down their caliber and serial numbers.

"Just routine, Mr. Skipperton," said the detective.

"I understand," said Skip.

That same evening Maggie telephoned and said she was at the Frosby house, and could she come over to see him?

"Why not? This is your house," Skip replied.

"I never know what kind of mood you'll be in—or temper," Maggie said when she arrived.

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"I'm in a pretty *good* mood, I think," Skipperton said. "And I hope you're happy, Maggie—since what's done is done."

Maggie was in her blue dungarees, sneakers, and in a familiar sweater. It was hard for Skip to realize that she was married. She sat looking down at the floor. Then she raised her eyes to him and said, "Pete's very upset. We never would have stayed a week in Boston unless he'd been sure the police were doing all they could here. Was Mr. Frosby—depressed? Pete didn't think so."

Skip laughed. "No! Best of spirits. Pleased with the marriage and all that." He waited, but Maggie was silent. "You're going to live at the Frosby place?"

"Yes." Maggie stood up. "I'd like to collect a few things, Daddy. I brought a suitcase." His daughter's coolness, her sadness, pained Skip. She had said something about visiting him often, nothing about his coming to see them—not that Skip would have gone.

"I know what's in that scarecrow," said Andy one day, and Skip turned, binoculars in hand, to see Andy standing in the doorway of his bedroom.

"Do you?—And what're you going to do about it?" Skip asked, braced for anything. He had squared his shoulders.

"Nothin'. Nothin'," Andy replied with a smile.

Skip didn't know how to take that. "I suppose you'd like some money, Andy? A little present for keeping quiet?"

"No, sir," Andy said quietly, shaking his head. His wind-wrinkled face bore a faint smile. "I ain't that kind."

What should Skip make of it? He was used to men who liked money, more and more of it. Andy was different, that was true. Well, so much the better if he didn't want money, Skip thought. It was cheaper. He also felt he could trust Andy. It was strange.

The leaves began to fall in earnest. Halloween was coming, and Andy removed the driveway gate in advance—just lifted it off its hinges, telling Skip that the kids would steal it if it remained there. Andy knew the district. The kids didn't do much harm, but it was trick or treat at every house. Skip and Andy made sure they had lots of nickels and dimes on hand, as well as corn candy, licorice sticks, and even a couple of pumpkins in the window, faces cut in them by Andy to show any comers that they were in the right spirit.

Then, on Halloween night, nobody knocked on Skip's door. There was a party at Coldstream, at the Frosbys'—Skip knew because the wind was blowing his way and he could hear the music. He thought

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of his daughter dancing, having a good time. Maybe people were wearing masks, crazy costumes. There'd be pumpkin pie with whipped cream, guessing games, maybe a treasure hunt.

Skip was lonely, for the first time in his life. *Lonely.* He badly wanted a Scotch, but he decided to keep his oath to himself, and, having decided this, asked himself why. He put his hands flat down on his dresser top and gazed at his own face in the mirror. He saw creases running from the flanges of his nose down beside his mouth, wrinkles under his eyes. He tried to smile, and the smile looked phony. He turned away from the mirror.

At that instant a spot of light caught his eye. It was out the window, in the upward sloping field. A procession—so it seemed, maybe eight or ten figures—was walking up his field with flashlights or torches or both. Skip opened the window slightly. He was rigid with rage, and fear. They were on his land! They had no right! And they were kids, he realized. Even in the darkness he could see by the procession's own torches that the figures were a lot shorter than adults' figures would be.

Skip whirled, ready to shout for Andy, and at once decided that he had better not. He ran downstairs and grabbed his own powerful flashlight. He didn't bother grabbing his jacket from a hook, though the night was crisp.

"Hey!" Skip yelled, when he had run several yards into the field. "Get off my property! What're you *doing* walking up there!"

The kids were singing some crazy, high-pitched song, nobody singing on key. It was just a wild treble chant. Skip recognized the word "scarecrow."

"We're going to burn the scarecrow . . . " something like that.

"Hey, there! Off my land!" Skip fell, banged a knee, and scrambled up again. The kids had heard him, Skip was pretty sure, but they weren't stopping. Never before had anyone disobeyed Skip—except for Maggie. *"Off my land!"*

The kids moved on like a black caterpillar with an orange headlight and a couple of other lights in its body. Certainly the last couple of kids had heard Skip, because he had seen them turn, then run to catch up with the others. Skip stopped running. The caterpillar was closer to the scarecrow than he was, and he was not going to be able to get there first.

Even as he thought this, a whoop went out. A scream! Another scream of mingled terror and delight shattered their chant. Hysteria broke out. What surely was a little girl's throat gave a cry as shrill

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as a dog whistle. Their hands must have touched the corpse—maybe touched bone, Skip thought.

Skip made his way back toward his own house, his flashlight pointed at the ground. It was worse than the police, somehow. Every kid was going to tell his parents what he had found. Skip knew he had come to the end. He had seen businessmen, seen a lot of men come to the end. He had known men who had jumped out of windows, who had taken overdoses.

Skip went at once to his rifle. It was in the living room downstairs. He put the muzzle in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

When the kids streaked down the field, heading for the road a few seconds later, Skip was dead. The kids had heard the shot, and thought someone was trying to shoot at them.

Andy heard the shot, too. He had been watching TV in his room. A minute before, the glow of torches from the string of kids going up the field had caught his eye, as he had been sitting near the window, but he had thought no more of the kids. They were just having fun, wandering around with torches on Halloween.

On hearing the shot, Andy's first thought was that Skipperton might have been firing in the air to celebrate Halloween, or maybe to scare the kids off his land—you never knew about Skipperton. Then, Andy wondered, could Skipperton have had an accident—cleaning his gun, something like that?

So Andy switched off his set and went over to Skipperton's house. No answer when he knocked, so he knocked again and called, "Mr. Skipperton?"

Then Andy fished his keys from his pocket and opened the back door. There was silence in the house, and a faint smell of gunsmoke. He found Skipperton on the living-room floor, blood coming from his mouth and the top of his head blown off.

Suddenly Andy realized. Skipperton had seen the kids going up to the scarecrow, and he had thought the kids would discover old Frosby's body. Sure, that must've been it! So Skipperton had killed himself, thinking—maybe thinking his life would be ruined, finished, if he was convicted of murder.

"Gosh, Mr. Skipperton—" Andy murmured, wordless after that, stricken with shock, even sorrow. Andy had liked old Skip. He had also wanted to keep his job here, so he had removed that corpse days ago and buried it so the police would never find it. If Mr. Skipperton had only known that!

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Had the burglar not been surprised by the sudden arrival of his host, he was surely planning to remove all the pictures from their frames, roll them up, and put them in the thick green-plastic rod-holder tube he'd brought . . .

THE EMPRESS OF THE SEA

by MILT ROSEN

The burglar was serious. Voller knew that the moment he walked into the den and saw the man's eyes, fierce even though the only light came from the large fishtank against the wall. This was no time for a man to attempt a foolish defense of his home and castle. Although six foot one and wide-shouldered, Voller reacted meekly. He put up his hands to show he was unarmed and kept the distance suggested.

Voller suspected the burglar was slightly overwhelmed by the opulence of the room. From the outside, the Voller house looked comfortable and obviously more than a tract home. There'd be some silver, the burglar no doubt surmised—jewelry, an antique or two, and, with luck, some nice paintings. Of late, paintings were doing well with the fences. The pleasant Tudor lines of the Voller house, however, didn't hint that the gentleman who lived behind it was a dedicated collector of beautiful objects, some of museum quality.

Waving his gun, an old Luger, the burglar indicated that he wanted Voller to sit on the leather-backed Eames chair that faced the desk. It was far enough from the phone or a hidden compartment somewhere on the full library wall that faced the door so that Voller couldn't attempt any foolish moves without being detected.

The burglar studied the small Alma-Tadema, one of the works of art he hadn't yet taken from the wall and stacked. Had he not been surprised by the sudden arrival of his host, he was surely planning to remove all the pictures from their frames, roll them up, and put them in the thick green-plastic rod-holder tube he'd brought.

Frames were left behind because of the bulk. Stacked next to the leaning tube were five silver pieces and a small Remington bronze. Although heavy, bronzes did well in the resale market.

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"Is this a good painting?" the burglar asked. The high pitch of his voice disappointed Voller. A burglar, especially one with such a swarthy face, should have a deep, threatening voice.

Voller said, "Not too good."

"You can keep it. It's too small to be worth anything."

The burglar moved on to the grouping of three Stewart Hayter prints behind the floor lamp. They weren't Hayter's best work, but Voller was fond of them. They reminded him that he had been into the work of this master print-maker two years before the dealers. No doubt assuming that three of any artist had to be valuable, the burglar removed them and placed them on the club chair he was using for storage. Indicating to Voller that his victim was behaving wisely, he returned to his shopping.

He ignored a Lord Leighton print and a tiny Rossetti pencil sketch. He stopped at a Lesanski ink-drawing. Voller said, "You really know your stuff. I don't like being robbed, but if it has to be, I'm glad an authority's doing it."

The burglar eyed him suspiciously for a moment. "Thanks," he said drily.

"Thank you for leaving me my Alma-Tadema. I love it."

"Is that the small one?"

"It's really not worth much."

"Maybe I ought to take it."

"It's a copy. It isn't worth a hundred dollars. You've got all the good ones."

"You're pulling my leg, pal." The burglar turned to go back to the Alma-Tadema.

Voller leaned forward. "I can show you. I can prove it."

"You're really pushing. It must be worth a fortune."

"Honest, I can prove it's nothing."

"Show me."

"I just had inventory taken for insurance purposes. The list is in my desk. It'll tell you. The middle drawer."

"Is this some kind of stall? Are you waiting for somebody to show up?"

"Sir, you did your homework. You know I live alone. It's only that I'd like to keep that painting. My wife gave it to me the year before she died."

The burglar eyed Voller for a moment, then smiled. "You got a list of all your stuff? Could be I missed something."

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Voller slapped his hands against his face. "Oh, brother, am I stupid!" he said feebly.

The burglar laughed. Walking to the desk, he said, "You're dumb, all right. I can't understand—how'd you get so rich? Being so dumb, I mean. Handing me a list of what you got? Brother, I sure wish they were all like you."

Voller continued to talk into the open palms against his face. "Stupid, stupid, stupid."

The middle drawer open, the burglar started to finger through the many papers. Finally he came to a stack of a dozen legal-size sheets held together by a large black clip. "This it?"

No response from Voller, the burglar scanned the top sheet and found nothing startling. Midway into the second page, he stopped and looked up at Voller. "Damn, don't you have anything worth more than five hundred?"

"My art is only a hobby."

"I don't see that Alma thing."

He found the Alma thing on the third sheet. "What a crazy name."

"You see, it's only worth a few pennies."

"Pennies can add up. Your wife gave it to you, huh? Could have done better. Unless you didn't let her spend any money."

Automatically, the burglar studied on. At the middle of the fourth sheet, he stopped. His lips pursed into a breathy whistle. Peeling off each word like a threat, he said, "What is this Empress of the Sea?"

"It's nothing. I sold it last year."

"You wouldn't have it on your list if you sold it. What's the Empress of the Sea? Fifty thousand—that's a bundle!"

"It's a mistake."

"You're going to be a mistake. Would you want your whole house torn up or do I get a clue? What's the Empress of the Sea?"

Voller hesitated. He took three deep breaths and said almost in a whisper, "It's my proudest possession. I've had it for twenty years."

"Don't stall, please."

"The Empress is a shell."

"A shell. Like in seashell? In that tank?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Mister, I know a con when I hear it."

"There are only two shells like it in the world."

"A shell worth fifty thousand?"

"You couldn't sell it. Legitimate collectors would know where it came from."

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"It's possible I could find somebody. I'm going to believe. Who'd dream up such a story?"

Putting his gun into his left hand and aiming it to show that he was still serious and alert to any sudden moves, the burglar removed the glove of his right hand and turned to look at the tank. Two three-inch seahorses floated in the bright water. They were tinted yellow by the tank lights. On the atoll-white bottom, nestled in a slight curve of glistening sand, was a display of seashells.

"Which one is it?" the burglar asked, although he certainly knew.

"Which one do you think?" Voller said, his voice remote.

"Just checking."

Reaching into the tank, the burglar was surprised to find the water cool. His fingers grasped at the multi-colored four-inch shell that had to be the Empress of the Sea. In the air, its colors became even more vivid—zagged blue lines crossing yellow and red circles, all resting on a light-purple skin. Under the light-purple skin there seemed to be another skin covered with multi-colored swirling designs, almost like a lush jacquard.

The burglar was impressed. He tore off several pages of scratch paper on the desk and covered the shell, which he put into his pea-jacket pocket. From his other jacket pocket, he brought out the thick twine, the end of which had been sticking out ominously.

Gagged with the sash from one of the drapes, Voller was soon bound hand and foot. The burglar smiled a thank-you and gathered his treasures. Voller fought back the tears but was unable to. Until the burglar walked out fifteen minutes later, he continued to shake his head and weep. Then he was alone.

Voller's weeping stopped abruptly. His face broke out into the widest smile the sash across his mouth would allow. As if counting a special ticking in his head, he waited for the sound—the sound of a green-plastic tube and pieces of metal statuary falling out of a dying burglar's hands as the paralysis overtook him.

The thud came. With it came the sound of the burglar's fingers scraping for life against the marble floor of the entryway.

Voller started to work his body free. As he worked, he gloated silently. He was pleased with the security system he had devised.

He thought, too, about the ocean where the magnificent Empress of the Sea lives among myriad enemies. Its sole defense is to poison those who touch it. A thousand tiny glands open and release their virulence onto the skin of a foe. The toxin is absorbed by the skin

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in as little as thirty seconds—a spiny lobster dies in two minutes, a red crab in five. A human being, higher on the evolutionary chain, dies in no more than fifteen.

Not rare, at some auctions for shell collectors the Empress of the Sea has often been bid up to two hundred dollars.

DETECTIVERSE

BRIEF TALE

by DOROTHY BELLE POLLACK

A lawyer was Jim—
His expertise
Was contract law,
Which he practiced with ease.
He was richer than Midas—
To those in the know,
The source of his riches
Was not *comme il faut.*
For Jim had a sideline—
The man was a whiz
At reaping huge gains from
The blackmailing biz.
His victims were many—
He plied his trade well
And managed to fleece
All his scared clientele.
But the ways of the wicked
Don't prosper forever—
His foes kept increasing
And they, too, were clever.
So now we report
Fate caught up with Jim
When someone took out
A contract on *him.*

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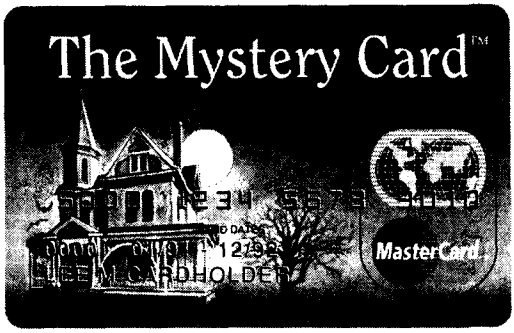

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Over-the-Credit-Limit Fee: $15 Cash Advances: 2% (minimum $2, maximum $10) Return Check Fee: $15 Late Payment Fee: 5% of each payment due or $5, whichever is lower	The $20 Annual Fee will be waived in subsequent years for card accounts with total annual purchases in the previous year of at least $6,500.

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first publication of the Oxford University Press Contest first-prize-winning story

Last year the Oxford University Press, in celebration of its publication of The Oxford Book of English Detective Stories *edited by Patricia Craig, sponsored a contest inviting readers of the anthology to write their own English detective story of no longer than 3,000 words, with English characters, settings, and institutions, the style in keeping with the traditional English detective story.*

The prize was $500, a rare first U.S. edition of A. Conan Doyle's The Hound of the Baskervilles, *and publication of the winning story in EQMM. The contest was judged by the consummate P. D. James, who praised the winning story, "Arms and the Woman" by Karen M. Sine, as "very much in the British tradition, with nicely differentiated suspects, a strong sense of place, and an original method of death."*

She added, "I am not entirely confident that the idea would work in practice, but total credibility has never been a strong feature of the traditional English detective story."

See what you think . . .

ARMS AND THE WOMAN

by KAREN M. SINE

Rain chilled the mourners on a dark spring day smelling of winter sea. A foghorn added its lament to the ceremonies of the grave as the unlikely suspects in the poisoning of Elizabeth Morris assembled to pay their damp respects.

The cold gloom that had settled on Chief Inspector Wren deepened at the sight of them. He stood on a small hummock slightly beyond the fringe of the villagers of Malverne. Wind blew in wet rags, stinging their faces, making them blink. Nobody wept.

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Elizabeth was laid to rest beside her husband Henry, whose funeral eight months before had been crowded with the stiff, pale faces of bereaved friends. The Chief Inspector had been one of them. Now he recalled Charles Elvin, the cheerful, gregarious sexton of St. Cuthbert's, standing beside him weeping openly in the sunlight.

"Ah, John," Charles had muttered in baffled anger, "why do the good go first?" The rector had raised an eyebrow at that, but no one else stirred, least of all the widow Charles had once described as deaf as a brass pig to criticism. Her husband had died of a heart attack while working contentedly in his garden.

"Of course, he wouldn't die in the house on her clean floor," someone had remarked at Henry's unofficial wake in The Crooked Man.

"Bloody woman," grumbled another mourner, "always pestering about his pipe."

"Sweeping crumbs, nattering her rubbish."

"Strange the things she came out with, like she had an ear at every door. The old gentleman tried to shut her off, but she would run on."

"The woman had a mouthful of mortal sins."

"*Time*," bawled Ray Durrell, the publican, "for a toast to an old friend. Henry was a fine gentleman. May we keep his kindness to heart." He poured a drink on the house, which quieted them.

Ray was a small, dapper man, bow-tied, bespectacled, with a silky baritone. He leaned toward the Chief Inspector and confided, "My missus said he was retiring for good. Burned his journals and let the wife clean out his workroom. He must have known he hadn't long. Amazing he put up with her as long as he did."

It *was* amazing that the quiet archivist, trusted confidant, and friend to three generations of Malverne's children could have lived so patiently with a gossiping harridan whose conversation was a minefield littered with the remains of blasted reputations.

Now the rain poured on her grave as if the chief mourner of Malverne's stormy petrel was the weather. Only a handful of those who had grieved at her husband's death were in attendance. They had positioned themselves at a discreet angle so that none need catch the Chief Inspector's eye. Neighbors, old friends of himself and his parents—their slight snub expressed a frenzy of disapproval at the investigation into Elizabeth's death.

All of them agreed it was a benign intervention by the godlings of the hearth, who apparently had roused themselves long enough to arrange her dispatch before sinking back into their hoary stupor.

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Now some minor irregularity in the autopsy report provoked unwanted inquiries. They viewed the investigation as bizarre mafficklings by an overwrought constabulary, and tasteless in the extreme.

Elizabeth Morris herself was tasteless in extremis. She had died of respiratory failure due to anaphylactic shock, something causing a violent allergic reaction that killed her before she could summon aid. Laboratory reports identified the allergen as aconite, or monkshood, a flowering plant found in half the gardens of the village.

Nearly everyone felt it was a most appropriate end for the libelous old woman. Too appropriate by half, brooded the Chief Inspector, studying the little group. He had known most of them for many years and was fond of them.

The rector had concluded the prayers and was talking to Hillary Rowan, the Morris's niece. The tall graceful woman had returned to Malverne several years ago when her husband died in a car accident. Her two daughters were at the university and she looked after the family woollen export business in Danebridge.

Now the Chief Inspector turned to approach her and nearly trod on Mrs. Wyncoop—who fluttered under his nose, cheeping indignantly.

"How dare you investigate us like common criminals, John Wren? Aconite, indeed! I'll have you know there's many a plant in my garden that could poison the whole town if I had a mind to. But," she felt constrained to point out, "it simply isn't done."

Lady Steele paused beside her, inquiring, "I trust you're not going to make a habit of this, Inspector?" The two women withdrew before he could reply, and in their wake Mrs. Dimmock bobbed mournfully, hooting at intervals, "Your poor mother."

"This must be very unsettling for you, John." Hillary stepped quietly to his side. Cool and stylish, the deep blue of her scarf reflected her eyes. Her tone was one of guarded amusement. She had known the stern set of his face since her childhood and wasn't in the least disturbed by it. Now she took his arm and held it tightly, but whether for his comfort or her own he wasn't sure. "I'll walk you to the car," she said.

"Can I drop you at home?"

"No. I like the rain."

In the distance they saw a solitary woman cloaked in brown slowly crossing the churchyard. She carried a basket of plants tied in small sheaves—russet, lavender, dark green. Curtained with rain among the headstones, she looked in her element. Hillary raised a hand in

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greeting and they saw her pause, nod slightly, then disappear behind the rectory.

"I like that woman," Hillary said. Her tone was serious now, oddly protective.

"Lily Oughtred, isn't it?"

"Yes." Hillary glanced at him and saw he was staring after the woman. His eyes were angry. "It was an accident, John."

"No, I'm afraid not."

"You're wrong this time." They had reached his car and turned to face one another, two intelligent people at odds, their breath misting in the chill between them.

"Come round tonight, Hillary. We'll talk some more."

She knew he meant his home. "Unofficial?"

"Yes."

"Very well, seven o'clock. Give Marjorie my love and tell her I'll be there." Her expression remained the same: calm and certain.

At police headquarters in Danebridge, Wren spent the afternoon studying detectives' reports of their interviews with the villagers. Malverne was a peaceful, ordinary place, he reflected, and yet he couldn't shake off the recurring sense of violation that passed like a shudder through his thoughts. Evil would fester and spread its rot through the boughs of friendship. And anyone, he was convinced, was capable of it sometime, no matter how calm or kind or familiar.

He lingered over his notes on Hillary, the only one he had interviewed himself, and again was struck by how much she had spoken of her uncle. It was as if her aunt's death merely opened the doors to pent-up memories, especially of Henry's last days.

She remembered him writing each evening at the big oak desk in his study. There were twelve thick notebooks full of his sketches, recipes for teas and ointments, illustrated botanical studies, neatly penned descriptions of the families he had known so long as they bloomed and faded like banks of flowers in his garden. He burned the notebooks one afternoon days before his death, entrusting their memories to the hearth.

Hillary recalled Henry's large round face gleaming with sweat. In the firelight it was ruddy, unsmiling, strangely blank. Occasionally he rose and went to the hall to answer a phonecall, but then always returned to feed his papers to the merry flames. Through the open door to his workroom he could hear Elizabeth rattling and clinking in his private domain. She was pouring bottles of powders

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and aromatic liquids down the sink. Her relentless whine was punctuated by sneezes and occasional breaking glass.

"Did you know the Reynolds' girl had twins and it's only six months since she wed?"

"Two fine big boys for such a small girl."

"He cheated on the exams just like his father once."

"Who is that now?"

"Alex Willoughby, Joan Dimmock's grandson. And her bragging all over town about his scholarship."

"How would you know such a thing, Libby?" She disliked the name as common. He knew that. It was a small parry. But she had moved on, busily seeking a new target.

"Maggie has supported that man every day of their married life. She runs the shop by herself while he's off fishing. Or *says* he is." Henry didn't answer any more. He just sighed and wiped his glasses. Elizabeth exploded in sneezes.

"I'll get your medicine, Aunt," Hillary had offered. She had been drying the bottles and jars, wrapping them in brown paper. Elizabeth refused her niece's offer and went off to choose a suitable antihistamine. Hillary went and sat by her uncle. They had talked quietly while she helped him tear the pages.

John sighed and went on to other reports. Eventually he made a list, then went to find Arthur Wright, the pathologist, to ask him a question.

"Interesting," Arthur said, his eyes very keen. "And quite possible. It's been done before."

"I know."

Clearly delighted with the idea, Arthur said, "I'll just make some tests," and hurried off to his accustomed lair.

On whom? the Chief Inspector wondered, faintly alarmed. Then he went to see Ray Kingsley, the Superintendent, who was brooding over Elizabeth's post mortem.

"Ah, John, I've been expecting you," Kingsley greeted him. "Nasty business. Tea?"

"Thanks. Have you finished with that?"

"I have," replied the Superintendent. "Aconite?" he asked, peering over the rims of his glasses. "Odd. Seems a bit medieval, doesn't it?" A straightforward shotgun blast, his tone implied, would have been more in keeping with conventional modern methods.

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"We haven't determined how she got it," John said. "The autopsy report says she hadn't eaten in several hours. Nothing was found near the body, nothing in her medication. No one admits to being with her, and no fingerprints were found other than those of the dead woman, her niece, and two friends who are accounted for that afternoon."

"I'm surprised she allowed anyone with fingerprints in the house," Kingsley observed drily, then added in a wistful tone, "No hope of suicide, I suppose?"

Wren smiled slightly, but his sharp grey eyes were serious. "No. It doesn't fit with her character or her recent behavior. Besides, there's no trace of a container. That's one reason why it simply wasn't ruled accidental death."

"Someone she knew was there and disposed of whatever it was?"

"Most likely."

The Superintendent, impeccably suave in the worst of times, now permitted himself a small frown. "This could be rather awkward, John," he said. "Some of those women play bridge with my wife." He paused a moment, as if testing this statement for hidden flaws, then continued unruffled. "The niece discovered the body not long after death. Does she live there?"

"No. She and Elizabeth never got along too well. Hardly surprising. Hillary seldom went to the house after her uncle's death. She's loved him since childhood and they had a great deal in common."

"Such as gardening?"

"Yes. She went to borrow some books from Henry's library. Hillary readily admits she could make tincture of aconite, but so do the other people Elizabeth had estranged in the past year."

Superintendent Kingsley consulted the list Wren handed him. "That includes one recluse—?"

"Lily Oughtred. A strange woman, but people like her. She sells herbs and vegetables in the village. Her brother is mentally handicapped and Elizabeth Morris was making noises about having him committed. Lily spent the day in Danebridge collecting some belongings left behind when she moved to Malverne. The rector was with her all afternoon."

The Superintendent stared at Wren briefly, then looked back at his list. "Three prominent dowagers. You haven't exactly rounded up the usual suspects, have you, John?"

"Mrs. Wyncoop, Mrs. Dimmock, Lady Steele. Elizabeth told stories about their husbands or children. Oddly enough, the tales had

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a faint ring of truth, but they were grossly distorted and had taken place some time ago. They insist her death was just a dreadful misunderstanding."

"Put that in your report. It's the sort of thing the Commissioner would take to heart. The next suspect is—yes, of course, a mother of six. Naturally. Anne Trevor. The professor's wife?"

"They live next door to the Morris place. Anne's a lovely woman, soft-spoken, very charming. She once threatened to shoot out all the windows and stand by while her children and their pets demolished Elizabeth's house."

"Good Lord. Wait a bit. Tall, blonde, beautiful soprano, expert in Renaissance music and history?"

"The very same."

"Wonderful. Go on."

"One of her children is dyslexic. Elizabeth told some minions the boy was a stupid illiterate. He was walking past at the time and heard her. She intended him to."

"Did she, by God!" roared Kingsley. His secretary looked in with alarm, then hastily withdrew. The superintendent immediately regained control, but his cheeks were pink.

"Dyslexic people are not stupid or illiterate," he said coldly. He rose from his desk and passed a hand over his face. He sighed. "John, I can put Pearson on this if you feel you're too involved with these people."

"No," Wren answered. "At least not yet. I have a glimmer of an idea, though it could turn out to be a will-of-the-wisp. I may know more after tonight."

That evening, Wren chewed fretfully on his pipe and stared at the fire while his wife prepared for tea. Firelight shone on her dark hair, eclipsing the grey. She laid the plates and cups on the linen-covered table by the hearth close to his mother. Moving a blue vase of sweetpeas to one side, her hand gently ruffled the petals, fragrancing the air with the scent of flowers. The ritual was familiar and ordinary, never failing to cheer him.

Marjorie finished pouring the tea. Aromatic steam mingled with the odors of buttered toast and firewood to soothe his thoughts. He began to relax.

"That woman was a nasty, evil-minded, meddling old weasel," his mother announced suddenly.

"That's most uncalled for, Mother," John said irritably.

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Mrs. Wren stared at him. "Very well," she said, as though graciously accepting the petty censure of a lesser literary critic. "That was in bad taste. Although I cannot understand why a frank appraisal of a poisonous scandal-monger is offensive to you, while turning loose a pack of detectives to rummage among our friends for clues to convict one of them for her alleged murder is perfectly good form."

"Have some tea, Mother," said Marjorie. "It's from Lily Oughtred."

"Most soothing," said Mrs. Wren with emphasis, as if the meal would have been a thicket of clashing swords but for the sedative effect of the Oughtred brew.

The doorbell rang. John said, "That will be Hillary," and went to answer it. Marjorie left the room to get another plate and said when she returned, "Hello, Hillary—what a nice surprise!" Both women looked at Wren with reproof, but he was in no mood for it. He took Hillary's coat and offered her a chair, but she stood by the fire with her arms crossed.

John settled himself and said bluntly, "It was Henry, wasn't it?"

"Oh, John, no!" gasped his wife. Hillary stared at him incredulously. She took a deep breath and sat down. "I was so sure you suspected Lily Oughtred. Or me," she added. "Perhaps I should have killed her long before Uncle Henry died." She looked at John's mother quickly and added, "I am sorry."

"That's all right, my dear." The old lady smiled sadly. "I've heard worse. Perhaps I should retire and leave you."

"No," said Hillary firmly. "You and your husband were among my uncle's closest friends. I'm sure he wouldn't mind your knowing." She reached down and took a large book from her handbag.

"The last of his journals," she said. "Not long before he died, he discovered that Elizabeth was using them to spy on their friends. He was sickened by it, maddened with grief. She didn't even respect *that* private sanctuary of his life. He brushed aconite on the borders of the pages of the more recent volumes so that when she licked her fingers to turn them, she would feel the tingling in her mouth. It was intended merely to frighten her."

"Why did he burn them?" John asked.

"Oh, you know him," she answered sadly. "He couldn't really harm anyone. I think he was shocked at having done what he called a hateful prank. He told me about it when he cleaned out his workroom. He was sick then, and very tired. It was the last time I saw him."

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"How did Elizabeth get one of the books?"

"He had left the room several times, and she went in there once to see what he was doing. She must have taken one then and hidden it. He wouldn't have noticed."

"You hid it again when you found it by her body?"

"Yes, on the bookshelf." She smiled faintly. "In plain sight. What will you do now, John?"

He looked at her a few moments. Then he took the journal and, stretching out, laid it open on the fire. "Carry out Henry's wishes," he said.

DETECTIVERSE

HOIST

by RUTH L. MITCHELL

Old Marvin was a henpecked spouse;
For years he could not please her—
She nagged him morning, noon, and night
(His impulse was to seize her).

"Hang up your clothes!" she'd scream at him,
Or "Don't track in that mud!"
Or "Wash your hands before you eat—
You slob, you're such a dud!"

At last, one day it happened—
She finally lost her voice.
Marv saw his chance at freedom
(And he quickly made his choice).

He did all the things that irked her
And she boiled with indignation,
Which she mouthed in frantic silence
'Til she croaked from sheer frustration.

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a distinguished reprint by

WILLIAM TREVOR

McDowd went out with his two sheepdogs to drive the cows in for milking. His wife washed herself, put the kettle on the stove, and knocked on her daughter's door. "Maureen!" she called. "Come on now, Maureen!"

It was not unusual that Maureen failed to reply. Mrs. McDowd re-entered her bedroom, stepped out of her nightdress, and dressed herself. "Get up out of that, Maureen!" she shouted, banging again on her daughter's door. "Are you sick?" she enquired, puzzled now by the lack of movement from within the room: always at this second rousing Maureen yawned or spoke. "Maureen!" she shouted again, and then opened the door.

William Trevor was born in County Cork in 1928 and has spent a considerable part of his life in Ireland. He presently lives in Devon with his wife and two sons. John Fowles said of him: "I don't know who now has the most right to claim Mr. Trevor, England or Ireland, nor do I much care, since it is clear to me that his excellence comes from a happy marriage of central values in both traditions. Art of this solidity and quality cannot be written from inside frontiers. It is, in the best sense of the word, international."

We have been wanting to bring you a story by Mr. Trevor that is especially appropriate for the reader of crime fiction. This one, which originally appeared in Grand Street *and is reprinted in Mr. Trevor's latest (seventh) collection of short fiction,* Family Sins and Other Stories, *will fill the bill—and sear your heart . . .*

"Q"

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EVENTS AT DRIMAGHLEEN

by WILLIAM TREVOR

Nothing as appalling had happened before at Drimaghleen; its people had never been so shocked. They'd had their share of distress, like any people; there were memories of dramatic occurrences; stories from a more distant past were told. In the 1880s a woman known as the Captain's Wife had run away with a hunchbacked pedlar. In 1798 there'd been resistance in the hills and fighting in Drimaghleen itself. During the Troubles, a local man had been executed in a field by the Black and Tans. But no story, and no long memory, could match the horror of the tragedy that awaited the people of Drimaghleen on May 22, 1985, a Wednesday morning.

The McDowds, that morning, awoke in their farmhouse and began the day as they always did, McDowd pulling on his shirt and trousers and lifting down a black overcoat from the pegs beside the kitchen door. He fastened it with a length of string which he kept in one of its pockets, found his socks in his gumboots, and went out with his two sheepdogs to drive the cows in for milking. His wife washed herself, put the kettle on the stove, and knocked on her daughter's door. "Maureen!" she called. "Come on now, Maureen!"

It was not unusual that Maureen failed to reply. Mrs. McDowd re-entered her bedroom, stepped out of her nightdress, and dressed herself. "Get up out of that, Maureen!" she shouted, banging again on her daughter's door. "Are you sick?" she enquired, puzzled now by the lack of movement from within the room: always at this second rousing Maureen yawned or spoke. "Maureen!" she shouted again, and then opened the door.

McDowd, calling in the cattle, was aware that there had been something wrong in the yard as he'd passed through it, but an early-morning torpor hindered the progression of his thoughts when he endeavored to establish what it was. His wife's voice shouting across the field at him, and his daughter's name used repeatedly in the information that was being inadequately conveyed to him, jolted him into an awareness that what had been wrong was that Mau-

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reen's bicycle had not been leaning against the kitchen windowsill.

"Maureen hasn't come back," his wife repeated again when he was close enough to hear her. "She's not been in her bed."

The cows were milked because no matter what the reason for Maureen's absence they had to be. The breakfast was placed on the kitchen table because no good would come of not taking food. McDowd, in silence, ate with an appetite that was unaffected; his wife consumed less than usual. "We will drive over," he said when they had finished, anger thickening his voice.

She nodded. She'd known as soon as she'd seen the unused bed that they would have to do something. They couldn't just wait for a letter to arrive, or a telegram, or whatever it was their daughter had planned. They would drive over to the house where Lancy Butler lived with his mother, the house to which their daughter had cycled the evening before. They did not share the thought that possessed both of them: that their daughter had taken the law into her own hands and gone off with Lancy Butler, a spoilt and useless man.

McDowd was a tallish, spare man of sixty-two, his face almost gaunt, grey hair ragged on his head. His wife, two years younger, was thin also, with gnarled features and the hands of a woman who all her life had worked in the fields. They did not say much to one another, and never had, but they did not quarrel, either. On the farm, discussion was rarely apt, there being no profit in it; it followed naturally that grounds for disagreement were limited. Five children had been born to the McDowds; Maureen was the youngest and the only one who had remained at home. Without a show of celebration, for that was not the family way, her twenty-fifth birthday had passed by a month ago.

"Put your decent trousers on," Mrs. McDowd urged. "You can't go like that."

"I'm all right the way I am."

She knew he would not be persuaded and did not try, but instead hurried back to her bedroom to change her shoes. At least he wouldn't drive over in the overcoat with the string round it: that was only for getting the cows in from the field when the mornings were cold. He'd taken it off before he'd sat down to his breakfast and there would be no cause to put it on again. She covered up her own old skirt and jumper with her waterproof.

"The little bitch," he said in the car, and she said nothing.

They both felt the same, anxious and cross at the same time, not wanting to believe the apparent truth. Their daughter had ungrate-

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fully deceived them: again in silence, the thought was shared while he drove the four miles to the Butlers' house. When they turned off the tarred road into a lane, already passing between the Butlers' fields, they heard the dog barking. The window of the Volkswagen on Mrs. McDowd's side wouldn't wind up, due to a defect that had developed a month ago: the shrill barking easily carried above the rattle of the engine.

That was that, they thought, listening to the dog. Maureen and Lancy had gone the night before, and Mrs. Butler couldn't manage the cows on her own. No wonder the old dog was beside himself. Bitterly, McDowd called his daughter a bitch again, though only to himself. Lancy Butler, he thought, my God! Lancy Butler would lead her a dance, and lead her astray, and lead her down into the gutters of some town. He'd warned her a thousand times about Lancy Butler. He'd told her the kind of fool he was.

"His father was a decent man," he said, breaking at last the long silence. "Never touched a drop."

"The old mother ruined him."

It wouldn't last long, they both thought. Lancy Butler might marry her, or he might wriggle out of it. But however it turned out, she'd be back in six months' time or at any rate a year's. There'd probably be a baby to bring up.

The car turned into the yard, and neither McDowd nor his wife immediately saw their daughter lying beside the pump. For the first few moments of their arrival their attention was claimed by the distressed dog, a black-and-white sheepdog like their own two. Dust had risen from beneath the Volkswagen's wheels and was still thick in the air as they stepped from the car. The dog was running wildly across a corner of the yard, back and forth, and back and forth again. The dog's gone mad, Mrs. McDowd thought, something's after affecting it. Then she saw her daughter's body lying by the pump, and a yard or so away her daughter's bicycle lying on its side, as if she had fallen from it. Beside the bicycle were two dead rabbits.

"My God," McDowd said, and his wife knew from his voice that he hadn't seen his daughter yet but was looking at something else. He had walked to another part of the yard, where the dog was. He had gone there instinctively, to try to calm the animal.

She knelt down, whispering to Maureen, thinking in her confusion that her daughter had just this minute fallen off her bicycle. But Maureen's face was as cold as stone, and her flesh had already stiffened. Mrs. McDowd screamed, and then she was aware that she was

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lying down herself, clasping Maureen's dead body. A moment later she was aware that her husband was weeping piteously, unable to control himself, that he was kneeling down, his hands on the body also.

Mrs. McDowd didn't remember rising to her feet, or finding the energy and the will to do so. "Don't go over there," she heard her husband saying to her, and saw him wiping at his eyes with the arm of his jersey. But he didn't try to stop her when she went to where the dog was; he remained on his knees beside their daughter, calling out to her between his sobs, asking her not to be dead.

The dog was crouched in a doorway, not barking any more. A yard or so away Mrs. Butler lay with one of her legs twisted under her, blood on the ground already turned brown, a pool of it still scarlet. Looking down at her, Mrs. McDowd thought with abrupt lucidity: Maureen did not fall off her bicycle.

She went back to where her daughter lay and behind the two tin barrels that stood by the pump she saw the body of Lancy Butler, and on the ground not far from it the shotgun that must have blown off Mrs. Butler's face.

O'Kelly of the Garda arrived at a swift conclusion. Old Mrs. Butler had been as adamant as the McDowds in her opposition to the match that her son and Maureen McDowd had planned for themselves. And there was more to it than that: Mrs. Butler had been obsessively possessive, hiding from no one her determination that no other woman should ever take her son away from her. Lancy was her only child, the single one to survive years of miscarrying. His father had died when Lancy was only two years old, leaving mother and child to lead a lonely life on a farm that was remote. O'Kelly knew that Mrs. Butler had been reputed to be strange in the head and given to furious jealousies where Lancy was concerned. In the kind of rage that people who'd known her were familiar with, she had shot her son's sweetheart rather than suffer the theft of him. He had wrenched the shotgun from her and by accident or otherwise it had exploded. A weak man at the best of times, he had turned it upon himself rather than face the reality of what had happened. This deduction, borne out by the details in the yard, satisfied O'Kelly of the Garda.

The people of Drimaghleen arrived themselves at the same conclusion. "It was always trouble," McDowd said on the day of the funer-

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als. "The minute she went out with Lancy Butler, it was trouble written down for poor Maureen."

Drimaghleen was a townland, with nothing to mark it except a crossroads that was known as Drimaghleen Crossroads. The modest farms that comprised it, each of thirty or so acres, were scattered among bogland, one separated from the next by several miles, as the McDowds' and the Butlers' were. The village of Kilmona was where the people of Drimaghleen went to Mass, and where they confessed to Father Sallins.

The children of the farms went to school in the small town of Mountcroe, driven each morning in a yellow bus that drove them back to the end of their lanes or farm tracks in the afternoon. Milk churns were collected in much the same way by the creamery lorry. Bread and groceries were bought in the village, fresh meat in Mountcroe.

When the men of Drimaghleen got drunk, they did so in Mountcroe, never in the village, although often they took a few bottles of stout there, in the bar beside the grocery counter. Hardware and clothes were bought in Mountcroe, which had had a cinema called the Abbey Picture House until the advent of television closed it in the early 1960s. Drimaghleen, Kilmona, and Mountcroe formed a world that bounded the lives of the people of the Drimaghleen farms. Rarely was there occasion to venture beyond it to the facilities of a town that was larger—unless the purpose happened to be a search for work or the first step on the way to exile.

The children of the McDowds, whose search for such work had taken them far from the townland, returned heartbroken for their sister's Mass. All four of them came, two with husbands, one with a wife, one on her own. The weddings which had taken place had been the last family occasions, two of them in Kilmona, the third in distant Skibbereen, the home of the girl whom the McDowds' son had married a year ago. That wedding was on their minds at Maureen's Mass—the long journey there had been in the Volkswagen, the night they had spent in Eldon's Hotel, the farewells the next day. Not in the wildest horror of a nightmare could any of the McDowds have guessed the nature of the occasion destined to bring them together next.

After the funeral, the family returned to the farm. The younger McDowds had known of Maureen's and Lancy Butler's attachment, and of their parents' opposition to it. They had known as well of Mrs. Butler's possessive affection for her son, having grown up with

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stories of this maternal eccentricity, and having witnessed Lancy himself, as a child and as a boy, affected by her indulgence. "Oh, it can wait, Lancy, it can wait," she would say a dozen times an hour, referring to some necessary chore on the farm. "Ah, sure, we won't bother with school today," she had said before that, when Lancy had complained of a difficulty he was experiencing with the seven-times table or Brother Martin's twenty weekend spellings. The people of Drimaghleen used to wonder whether the farm or Lancy would suffer more in the end.

"What did she see in him?" Mrs. McDowd mused sadly at the funeral meal. "Will anyone ever tell me what she saw in him?"

They shook their heads. The cheeks of all of them were still smeared with the tears they had shed at the service. Conversation was difficult.

"We will never recover from it," the father said with finality in his voice. It was all that could be said, it was all they knew with certainty: for as long as the older McDowds remained in this farmhouse—which would be until their own deaths—the vicious, ugly tragedy would haunt them. They knew that if Maureen had been knocked from her bicycle by a passing motorcar they could have borne her death with greater fortitude; or if she had died of an illness, or been the victim of incurable disease. The knife that turned in their pain was their memory of the Butlers' farmyard, the barking dog running back and forth, the three still bodies. There was nothing but the waste of a life to contemplate, and the cruelty of chance—for why should it have been simple, pretty Maureen whose fate it was to become mixed up with so peculiar a couple as that mother and son? There were other girls in the neighborhood—underhand girls and girls of doubtful character—who somehow more readily belonged with the Butlers: anyone would tell you that.

"Why don't you drive over and see us?" one of the daughters invited. "Can't we persuade you?"

Her father stared into the table without trying to reply. It was unnecessary to say that a drive of such a distance could only be contemplated when there was a wedding or a funeral. Such journeys had not been undertaken during Maureen's lifetime, when she might have looked after the farm for a day; in no way could they be considered now. Mrs. McDowd tried to smile, making an effort to acknowledge the concern that had inspired the suggestion, but no smile came.

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Being of a nature that might interest strangers, the deaths were reported in the newspapers. They were mentioned on the radio, and on the television news. Then everything became quiet again at Drimaghleen, and in the village and in the town. People wrote letters to the McDowds, expressing their sorrow. People came to see them but did not stay long.

"I am always there," Father Sallins said. "Kilmona 23. You have only to summon me. Or call up at the rectory."

The McDowds didn't. They watched the summer going by, taking in their hay during the warm spell in June, keeping an eye on the field of potatoes and the ripening barley. It began to rain more than usual; they worried about the barley.

"Excuse me," a man said in the yard one afternoon in October. "Are you Mr. McDowd?"

McDowd said he was, shouting at the dogs to behave themselves. The stranger would be a traveler in fertilizers, he said to himself, a replacement for Donoghue, who had been coming to the farm for years. Then he realized that it was the wrong time of year for Donoghue.

"Would it be possible to have a word, Mr. McDowd?"

McDowd's scrawny features slowly puckered; slowly he frowned. He lifted a hand and scratched at his grey, ragged hair, which was a way he had when he wished to disguise bewilderment. Part of his countryman's wiliness was that he preferred outsiders not to know, or deduce, what was occurring in his mind.

"A word?" he said.

"Could we maybe step inside, sir?"

McDowd saw no reason to step inside his own house with this man. The visitor was florid-faced, untidily dressed in dark corduroy trousers and a gabardine jacket. His hair was long and black, and grew coarsely down the sides of his face in two brushlike panels. He had a city voice; it wasn't difficult to guess he came from Dublin.

"What d'you want with me?"

"I was sorry to hear that thing about your daughter, Mr. McDowd. That was a terrible business."

"It's over and done with."

"It is, sir. Over and done with."

The red bonnet of a car edged its way into the yard. McDowd watched it, reminded of some cautious animal by the slow, creeping movement, the engine purring so lightly you could hardly hear it. When the car stopped by the milking shed nobody got out of it, but

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McDowd could see a figure wearing sunglasses at the wheel. This was a woman, with black hair also, smoking a cigarette.

"It could be to your advantage, Mr. McDowd."

"What could be? Does that car belong to you?"

"We drove down to see you, sir. That lady's a friend of mine, a colleague by the name of Hetty Fortune."

The woman stepped out of the car. She was taller than the man, with a somber face and blue trousers that matched her blue shirt. She dropped her cigarette onto the ground and carefully stubbed it out with the toe of her shoe. As slowly as she had driven the car, she walked across the yard to where the two men were standing. The dogs growled at her, but she took no notice. "I'm Hetty Fortune," she said in an English accent.

"I didn't tell you my own name, Mr. McDowd," the man said. "It's Jeremiah Tyler."

"I hope Jeremiah has offered you our condolences, Mr. McDowd. I hope both you and your wife will accept our deepest sympathy."

"What do you want here?"

"We've been over at the Butlers' place, Mr. McDowd. We spent a long time there. We've been talking to a few people. Could we talk to you, d'you think?"

"Are you the newspapers?"

"In a manner of speaking. Yes, in a manner of speaking we represent the media. And I'm perfectly sure," the woman added hastily, "you've had more than enough of all that. I believe you'll find what we have to say to you is different, Mr. McDowd."

"The wife and myself have nothing to say to the newspapers. We didn't say anything at the time, and we have nothing to say since. I have things to do about the place."

"Mr. McDowd, would you be good enough to give us five minutes of your time? Five minutes in your kitchen, talking to yourself and your wife? Would you give us an opportunity to explain?"

Attracted by the sound of voices, Mrs. McDowd came out of the house. She stood in the doorway, not quite emerging from the kitchen porch, regarding the strangers even more distrustfully than her husband had. She didn't say anything when the woman approached her and held out a hand which she was obliged to shake.

"We're sorry to obtrude on your grief, Mrs. McDowd. Mr. Tyler and I have been keen to make that clear to your husband."

Mrs. McDowd did not acknowledge this. She didn't like the look of the somber-faced woman or her unkempt companion. There was

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a seediness about him, a quality that city people seemed often to exude if they weren't smartly attired. The woman wasn't seedy but you could see she was insincere from the way her mouth was. You could hear the insincerity when she spoke.

"The full truth has not been established, Mrs. McDowd. It is that that we would like to discuss with you."

"I've told you no," McDowd said. "I've told them to go away," he said to his wife.

Mrs. McDowd's eyes stared at the woman's sunglasses. She remained where she was, not quite coming into the yard. The man said, "Would it break the ice if I took a snap? Would you mind that, sir? If I was to take a few snaps of yourself and the wife?"

He had spoken out of turn. A shadow of anger passed over the woman's face. The fingers of her left hand moved in an irritated wriggle. She said quickly, "That's not necessary at this stage."

"We've got to get the pictures, Hetty," the man mumbled, hushing the words beneath his breath so that the McDowds wouldn't hear. But they guessed the nature of his protest, for it showed in his pink face. The woman snapped something at him.

"If you don't leave us alone we'll have to get the Guards," McDowd said. "You're trespassing on this land."

"Is it fair on your daughter's memory that the truth should be hidden, Mr. McDowd?"

"Another thing is, those dogs can be fierce if they want to be."

"It isn't hidden," Mrs. McDowd said. "We all know what happened. Detectives worked it out, but sure anyone could have told them."

"No, Mrs. McDowd, nothing was properly worked out at all. That's what I'm saying to you. The surface was scarcely disturbed. What seemed to be the truth wasn't."

McDowd told his wife to lock the door. They would drive over to Mountcroe and get a Guard to come back with them. "We don't want any truck with you," he harshly informed their visitors. "If the dogs eat the limbs off you after we've gone, don't say it wasn't mentioned."

Unmoved by these threats, her voice losing none of its confidence, the woman said that what was available was something in the region of three thousand pounds. "For a conversation of brief duration, you would naturally have to be correctly reimbursed. Already we have taken up your working time, and of course we're not happy about that. The photograph mentioned by Mr. Tyler would naturally have the attachment of a fee. We're talking at the end of the day of something above a round three thousand."

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Afterwards, the McDowds remembered that moment. They remembered the feeling they shared, that this was no kind of trick, that the money spoken of would be honestly paid. They remembered thinking that the sum was large, that they could do with thirty pounds, never mind three thousand. Rain had destroyed the barley; they missed their daughter's help on the farm; the tragedy had aged and weakened them. If three thousand pounds could come out of it, they'd maybe think of selling up and buying a bungalow.

"Let them in," McDowd said, and his wife led the way into the kitchen.

The scene of the mystery is repeated all over rural Ireland. From Cork to Cavan, from Roscommon to Rosslare, you will come across small, tucked-away farms like the Butlers' and the McDowds'. Maureen McDowd had been gentle-natured and gentle-tempered. The sins of sloth and greed had not been hers; her parents called her a perfect daughter, close to a saint. A photograph, taken when Maureen McDowd was five, showed a smiling, freckled child; another showed her in her First Communion dress; a third, taken at the wedding of her brother, was of a healthy-looking girl, her face creased up in laughter, a cup of tea in her right hand. There was a photograph of her mother and father, standing in their kitchen. Italicized beneath it was the information that it had been taken by Jeremiah Tyler. *The Saint of Drimaghleen,* Hetty Fortune had written, *never once missed Mass in all her twenty-five years.*

The story was told in fashionably faded pictures. "You know our Sunday supplement?" Hetty Fortune had said in the McDowd's kitchen, but they hadn't: newspapers from England had never played a part in their lives. They read the *Sunday Independent* themselves.

The Butlers' yard was brownly bleak in the pages of the supplement; the pump had acquired a quality not ordinarily noticed. A bicycle similar to Maureen's had been placed on the ground, a sheepdog similar to the Butlers' nosed about the doors of the cowshed. But the absence of the three bodies in the photographed yard, the dust still rising where the bicycle had fallen, the sniffing dog, lent the composition an eerie quality—horror conveyed without horror's presence. "You used a local man?" the supplement's assistant editor enquired, and when informed that Jeremiah Tyler was a Dublin man he requested that a note be kept of the photographer's particulars.

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"The Gardai—in particular, Superintendent O'Kelly—saw only what was convenient to see. Of the three bodies that lay that morning in the May sunshine, they chose that of Lancy Butler to become the victim of their sluggish imagination. Mrs. Butler, answering her notoriously uncontrollable jealousy, shot her son's sweetheart rather than have him marry her. Her son, so Superintendent O'Kelly infers from no circumstantial evidence whatsoever, wrenched the shotgun out of her hands and fired on her in furious confusion. He then, within seconds, took his own life. The shotgun bore the fingerprints of all three victims: what O'Kelly has signalled failed to explain is why this should be so.

"Why should the Butlers' shotgun bear the fingerprints of Maureen McDowd? O'Kelly declares that 'in the natural course of events' Maureen McDowd would have handled the shotgun, being a frequent visitor to the farm. Frequent visitors, in our experience, do not, 'in the natural course of events' or otherwise, meddle with a household's firearms. The Superintendent hedges the issue because he is himself bewildered. The shotgun was used for keeping down rabbits, he states, knowing that the shotgun's previous deployment by the Butlers is neither here nor there. He mentions rabbits because he still can offer no reasonable explanation why Maureen McDowd should ever have handled the death weapon. The fingerprints of all three victims were blurred and 'difficult,' and had been found on several different areas of the weapon. Take it or leave it is what the Superintendent is saying. And wearily he is saying: Does it matter?

"We maintain it does matter. We maintain that this extraordinary crime—following, as it does, hard on the heels of the renowned Kerry Babies mystery, and the Flynn case—has not been investigated, but callously shelved. The people of Drimaghleen will tell you everything that O'Kelly labored over in his reports: the two accounts are identical. Everyone knows that Lancy Butler's mother was a sharp-tongued, possessive woman. Everyone knows that Lancy was a ne'er-do-well. Everyone knows that Maureen McDowd was a deeply religious girl. Naturally it was the mother who sought to end an intrusion she could not bear. Naturally it was slow, stupid Lancy who didn't pause to think what the consequences would be after he'd turned the gun on his mother. Naturally it was he who could think of no more imaginative way out of his dilemma than to join the two women who had dominated his life.

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"The scenario that neither O'Kelly nor the Butlers' neighbors paused to consider is a vastly different one. A letter, apparently—and astonishingly—overlooked by the police, was discovered behind the drawer of a table which was once part of the furniture of Lancy Butler's bedroom and which was sold in the general auction after the tragedy—land, farmhouse, and contents having by this time become the property of Allied Irish Banks, who held the mortgage on the Butlers' possessions. This letter, written by Maureen McDowd a week before the tragedy, reads:

" 'Dear Lancy, Unless she stops I can't see any chance of marrying you. I want to, Lancy, but she never can let us alone. What would it be like for me in your place, and if I didn't come to you where would we be able to go because you know my father wouldn't accept you here. She has ruined the chance we had, Lancy, she'll never let go of you. I am always cycling over to face her insults and the way she has of looking at me. I think we have reached the end of it.'

"This being a direct admission by Maureen McDowd that conclusion in the romance had been arrived at, why would the perceptive Mrs. Butler—a woman who was said to 'know your thoughts before you knew them yourself'—decide to kill Lancy's girl? And the more the mental makeup of that old woman is dwelt upon, the more absurd it seems that she would have destroyed everything she had by committing a wholly unnecessary murder. Mrs. Butler was not the kind to act blindly, in the fury of the moment. Her jealousy and the anger that protected it smoldered cruelly within her, always present, never varying.

"But Maureen McDowd—young, impetuous, bitterly deprived of the man she loved—a saint by nature and possessing a saint's fervor, on that fatal evening made up for all the sins she had ever resisted. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned—except perhaps a woman unfairly defeated. The old woman turned the screw, aware that victory was in sight. The insults and 'the way of looking' became more open and more arrogant; Mrs. Butler wanted Maureen McDowd out, she wanted her gone forever, never to dare to return.

"It is known that Lancy Butler found two rabbits in his snares that night. It is known that he and Maureen often made the rounds of the snares when she visited him in the evenings. He would ride her bicycle to the field where they were, Maureen sitting sidesaddle on the carrier at the back. Lancy had no bicycle of his own. It is our deduction that the reason the shotgun bore Maureen's fingerprints is because they had gone on a shooting expedition as well and when

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they returned to the yard she was carrying both the shotgun and the snared rabbits.

"It is known that Maureen McDowd wept shortly before her death. In the fields, as they stalked their prey, Lancy comforted her, but Maureen knew that never again would they walk here together, that never again would she come over to see him in the evening. The hatred his mother bore her, and Lancy's weakness, had combined to destroy what most of all she wanted. Mrs. Butler was standing in the yard shouting her usual abuse and Maureen shot her. The rabbits fell to the ground as she jumped off the bicycle, and her unexpectedly sudden movement caused the bicycle itself, and Lancy on it, to turn over. He called out to her when it was too late, and she realized she could never have him now. She blamed him for never once standing up to his mother, for never making it easier. If she couldn't have this weak man whom she so passionately loved, no one else would either. She shot her lover, knowing that within seconds she must take her own life, too. And that, of course, she did."

There was more about Maureen. In the pages of the color supplement, Mrs. McDowd said her daughter had been a helpful child. Her father said she'd been his special child. When she was small she used to go out with him to the fields, watching how he planted the seed-potatoes. Later on, she would carry out his tea to him, and later still she would assist with whatever task he was engaged in. Father Sallins gave it as his opinion that she had been specially chosen. A nun at the convent in Mountcroe remembered her with lasting affection.

"O'Kelly fell prey to this local feeling. Whether they knew what they were doing or not, the people of Drimaghleen were protecting the memory of Maureen McDowd, and the Superintendent went along with the tide. She was a local girl of unblemished virtue, who had been 'specially chosen.' Had he publicly arrived at any other conclusion, Superintendent O'Kelly might never safely have set foot in the neighborhood of Drimaghleen again, nor the village of Kilmona, nor the town of Mountcroe. The Irish do not easily forgive the purloining of their latter-day saints."

"I wanted to tell you this stuff had been written," Father Sallins said. "I wanted it to be myself that informed you before you'd get a shock from hearing it elsewhere."

He'd driven over specially. As soon as the story in the paper had been brought to his own notice, he'd felt it his duty to sit down with

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the McDowds. In his own opinion, what had been printed was nearly as bad as the tragedy itself, his whole parish maligned, a police superintendent made out to be no better than the criminals he daily pursued. He'd read the thing through twice; he'd looked at the photographs in astonishment.

Hetty Fortune and Jeremiah Tyler had come to see him, but he'd advised them against poking about in what was over and done with. He'd explained that people wanted to try to forget the explosion of violence that had so suddenly occurred in their midst, that he himself still prayed for the souls of the Butlers and Maureen McDowd. The woman had nodded her head, as though persuaded by what he said. "I have the camera here, Father," the man had remarked as they were leaving. "Will I take a snap of you?" Father Sallins had stood by the hydrangeas, seeing no harm in having his photograph taken.

"I'll send it down to you when it's developed," the man said, but the photograph had never arrived. The first he saw of it was in the Sunday magazine, a poor likeness of himself, eyelids drooped as though he had drink taken, dark stubble on his chin.

"This is a terrible thing," he said in the McDowds' kitchen, remembering the photograph of that also: the cream-enameled electric cooker, the Holy Child on the green-painted dresser beside the alarm clock and the stack of clothes-pegs, the floor carpeted for coziness, the blue formica-topped table, the radio, the television set. In the photograph, the kitchen had acquired an extraneous quality, just as the photograph of the Butlers' yard had. The harsh, ordinary colors, the soiled edges of the curtains, the chipped paintwork, seemed like part of a meticulous composition: the photograph was so much a picture that it invited questioning as a record.

"We never thought she was going to say that about Maureen," Mrs. McDowd said. "It's lies, Father."

"Of course it is, Mrs. McDowd."

"We all know what happened that night."

"Of course we do."

McDowd said nothing. They had taken the money. It was he who had said that the people should be allowed into the house. Three thousand, one hundred and fifty pounds was the sum the woman had written the check for, insisting that the extra money was owed.

"You never said she'd been specially chosen, Father?"

"Of course I didn't, Mrs. McDowd."

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He'd heard that Superintendent O'Kelly had gone to see a solicitor to enquire if he'd been libeled, and although he was told he probably had been he was advised that recourse in the courts would be costly and might not be successful. The simple explanation of what had happened at the Butlers' farm had been easy for the people of Drimaghleen and for the police to accept because they had known Mrs. Butler and they had known her son. There'd been no mystery, there'd been no doubt.

"Will we say a prayer together?" the priest suggested.

They knelt, and when they rose again Mrs. McDowd began to cry. Everyone would know about it, she said, as if the priest had neither prayed nor spoken. The story would get about and people would believe it. "Disadvantaged people," she quoted from the newspaper. She frowned, still sobbing, over the words. "It says the Butlers were disadvantaged people. It says we are disadvantaged ourselves."

"That's only the way that woman has of writing it down, Mrs. McDowd. It doesn't mean much."

" 'These simple farm folk,' " Mrs. McDowd read, " 'of Europe's most western island form limited rural communities that all too often turn in on themselves.' "

"Don't pay attention," Father Sallins advised.

"Does disadvantaged mean we're poor?"

"The way that woman would see it, Mrs. McDowd."

There was confusion now in Drimaghleen, in Kilmona and Mountcroe; and confusion, Father Sallins believed, was insidious. People had been separated from their instinct, and other newspaper articles would follow upon this one. More strangers would come. Father Sallins imagined a film being made about Maureen McDowd, and the mystery that had been created becoming a legend. The nature of Maureen McDowd would be argued over, books would be written because all of it was fascinating. Forever until they died, her mother and her father would blame themselves for taking the money their poverty had been unable to turn away.

"The family'll see the pictures."

"Don't upset yourself, Mrs. McDowd."

"No one ever said she was close to being a saint. That was never said, Father."

"I know, I know."

Mrs. McDowd covered her face with her hands. Her thin shoulders heaved beneath the pain of her distress; sobs wrenched at her body. Too much had happened to her, the priest thought; it was too much

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for any mother that her murdered daughter should be accused of murder herself in order to give newspaper readers something to think about. Her husband had turned away from the table she sat at. He stood with his back to her, looking out into the yard.

In a low, exhausted voice he said: "What kind of people are they?"

The priest slowly shook his head, unable to answer that, and in the kitchen that looked different in Jeremiah Tyler's photograph Mrs. McDowd screamed. She sat at the blue-topped table with her lips drawn back from her teeth, one short, shrill scream followed fast upon another. Father Sallins did not again attempt to comfort her. McDowd remained by the window.

DETECTIVERSE

LONER DONOR

by LOU PICIULLO

Choosy Suzie Loveless
Would never take a suitor—
This one wasn't rich enough
And that one could be cuter;
This one drove a beat-up car
And that one had no chin—
'Til finally a would-be beau
Just had to do her in.
"No one's good enough for her,
She don't deserve a life—
She'll never care for any man."
He killed her with a knife.
I guess he'd be surprised to hear
What happened yesterday—
A burglar at the organ bank
Stole Suzie's heart away.

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ON OUR COVER

When *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* won the Tony Award for Best Musical, Rupert Holmes simultaneously became the first sole recipient of Tony Awards for both Best Book and Best Score. The New York Drama Critics bestowed on him the same three honors, with the fourth award in the additional category of Best Orchestration. Prior to *Drood,* Holmes was best known to the general public as the singer/songwriter whose multi-platinum recording of "Escape (The Pina Colada Song)" was the first #1 record of the 1980s, and was followed by a string of Top 40 hits and the platinum album, *Partners in Crime.* Most notable among the many vocalists who have recorded his words and music over the last decade is Barbara Streisand, for whom he wrote, arranged, and co-produced the classic *Lazy Afternoon* album.

With Rupert on the cover especially photographed by Peter Papadopolous during the run of his most recent Broadway success, *Accomplice,* are the female stars of the production, Natalia Nogulich and Pamela Brüll.

Natalia Nogulich's Broadway credits include *The Iceman Cometh* with Jason Robards and *Hurlyburly* with William Hurt. She won the 1988 Drama-Logue Award for her performance in *Once in a Lifetime* and the same award in 1987 for playing the title role in *Hedda Gabler.*

Pamela Brüll made her Broadway debut with *Accomplice.* She plays the continuing role of Thelma on *Growing Pains* and has made many appearances on such programs as *Not Necessarily the News, Just the Ten of Us, Hunter, Scarecrow and Mrs. King, Falcon Crest,* and *Knots Landing.*

Rupert Holmes has received Edgars from the MWA for both *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and *Accomplice.* After its Broadway run, *Accomplice* has had extended-run critical and commercial successes in Chicago, Dallas, Miami and Toronto. There are numerous productions scheduled from New Jersey to New Mexico, so it's becoming a truly national show.

His song, "Brass Knuckles," a homage to the hardboiled school appears later in this issue.

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

One of this columnist's favorite crime novel sub-categories is the Big Trial book. Though its history goes back at least to 1850 and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Ways of the Hour,* it is principally a twentieth century phenomenon, including such bestselling titles as Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (1925), Frances Noyes Hart's *The Bellamy Trial* (1927), Meyer Levin's *Compulsion* (1956), Robert Traver's *Anatomy of a Murder* (1958), and Scott Turow's *Presumed Innocent* (1987). Though never vanishing completely, the Big Trial novel tends to go in and out of fashion, often given fresh impetus by a key success. Thanks in part to Turow, the category enjoys a bull market at the moment, and here are two good recent examples, both set in that rich crime-fiction locale, the state of Florida.

*** Arnold C. Stream: *Until Proven Guilty,* Scarborough House, $19.95. Nothing makes for more fascinating courtroom give-and-take than a murder prosecution where no body was found. New York attorney Tommy Attleboro travels south to defend a boyhood friend on a charge of murdering his wife Lorna, who has vanished in an Everglades boating incident. Did she die by accident or murder—or did she die at all? The trial scenes are expertly done, with Stream's recognized courtroom savvy adding an extra touch of authority.

*** Harrison Arnston: *Act of Passion,* Harper, $4.95. Big Trial books may or may not also be whodunits. In this 500-page paperback original, the set-up is so well done, the mysteries and contradictions so well established, the questions so cunningly planted in the reader's mind, you wonder if the pay-off can possibly live up to what has gone before. To a large degree it does, though Arnston plays so fairly, the final revelation probably won't be a complete surprise to many readers. Ann Cohen is accused of murdering her husband and his mistress, and she is defended by a celebrated lawyer whose interest in her is more than professional.

*** Marc Berrenson: *Special Circumstances,* Avon, $3.50. Equally steeped in the world of lawyers, though spending less time in court, is this off-beat urban crime novel, as much a consideration of the morality of criminal advocacy as a mystery. Los Angeles lawyer Ben Green is appointed to defend an admitted drug dealer on a murder charge. The unexpected direction the story takes will be an even bigger surprise if you read the publisher's blurb first.

*** Anne Perry: *Highgate Rise,* Fawcett Columbine, $18.00. This latest in the distinguished series

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about Victorian London's Charlotte and Thomas Pitt is fully up to the author's high standard. The socially active wife of a prominent London doctor dies in a fire. Was he the real target, or did the woman's efforts on behalf of the poor make her a threat to powerful exploiters? It's disconcerting that a novel about the social injustices of Victorian England can seem so relevant in the United States one hundred years later.

*** Crabbe Evers: *Murder in Wrigley Field,* Bantam, $3.95. In an example of a recent phenomenon that might be called the mystery novel miniseries —another is Jane Haddam's holiday quartet from the same publisher—this is the first of three baseball novels by Evers slated to appear during the 1991 season. With its rich store of Chicago diamond lore, it should delight Cub fans especially. (Yankee and Dodger fans, your time will come.) Like some other mysteries steeped in the horsehide sport—from Cortland Fitzsimmons's *Death on the Diamond* (1934) to Michael Avallone's *Dead Game* (1954) to R. D. Rosen's *Strike Three You're Dead* (1984)—it will have smaller appeal to the nonfan. The colorful style of narrator-sleuth Duffy House, a retired sportswriter whose beautiful niece Petey collaborates on detecting duties, is the novel's strongest card. Behind the Evers pseudonym are two authors, Reinder van Til and William Brashler, the latter author of baseball biographies and the well known novel, later filmed, *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings.*

*** Jeremiah Healy: *Right to Die,* Pocket, $18.95. Another book with a sports angle, albeit one extraneous to the main plot, is the latest about Boston private eye John Francis Cuddy. Amid efforts to find out who is sending anonymous threats to law professor and prominent right-to-die advocate Maisy Andrus, Cuddy trains for the Boston Marathon with the help of a homeless running coach. Healy's chapter on the race itself is fine though fully detachable from the mystery, which is well cast and well solved albeit with a surprise culprit many readers will probably spot.

*** Elliott Roosevelt: *A First Class Murder,* St. Martin's, $17.95. Readers like me who can't resist traditional whodunits set on oceanliners will want to take this 1938 crossing of the ill-fated *Normandie* in company with factional sleuth Eleanor Roosevelt. Also on board, in relatively minor roles, are Jack Benny, Mary Livingstone, Charles Lindbergh, and Henry Luce. More prominent and unusually well captured are Josephine Baker and John F. Kennedy, the latter a girl-chasing Harvard student whose older brother is being groomed for a political career. The gimmick in the howdunit poisoning of a Soviet diplomat has whiskers, but the melding of fictional murder and real-life world events is as well done as ever. Though author Roosevelt died in 1990, the publisher assures there

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are more books to come in the series.

** Trella Crespi: *The Trouble with a Small Raise,* Zebra, $3.95. This romantic whodunit, first in a series about Italian-American ad agency executive Simona Griffo, is slow to gather momentum and boasts the most unconvincing team of police detectives in recent memory. (For one thing, they seem to move remarkably slowly in the first week after the crime.) Still, the readable style and interesting cast of characters hold promise for future entries.

** Wayne Warga: *Singapore Transfer,* Viking, $17.95. In his third case, mid-life-crisising book-dealer Jeffrey Dean is lured to Singapore on a ghostwriting job and becomes involved in a jade smuggling investigation. This is a brief, low-key, readable travelogue mystery, its somewhat banal development suggesting a screen treatment more than a novel. Though it seems unlikely for most of the book's length, Warga does have some surprises in store. In the advance galley I read, Dean misdates Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (should be 1934, not 1926) and Warga seems to think the offensive term "Chinaman" is acceptable in third-person narration.

Though he hasn't received the acclaim of contemporaries like Christie, Sayers, Marsh, and Innes, in part because he was less prolific, Cyril Hare was one of the best of the British mystery writers to begin their careers between the World Wars. Among the recent reprints are his first two novels, *Tenant for Death* (1937) and *Death is No Sportsman* (1938), both featuring Inspector Mallett in the years before he joined forces with the better known barrister-sleuth Francis Pettigrew.

Hare was an occasional *EQMM* contributor in the fifties and sixties. Indeed, as the magazine's fiftieth anniversary year goes on, it's worth repeating that nearly every major name in crime and mystery fiction has appeared in these pages at one time or another, including even the great (though belatedly recognized) master of *noir* fiction Jim Thompson, in July 1956 (the first issue of the magazine I ever bought) with "A Flaw in the System" and in April 1967 with "Exactly What Happened." That Thompson, whose *The Killer Inside Me* (1952) has long had the status of a cult classic, is the hottest he has ever been several years after his death, with film versions of *The Grifters, After Dark, My Sweet,* and *The Kill-Off* all appearing in 1990, is an especially poignant irony given the downbeat nature of his writings and his life. Michael J. McCauley's enthralling *Jim Thompson: Sleep with the Devil* (Mysterious Press, $19.95) is the first book-length biographical/critical study of Thompson and undoubtedly not the last.

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a *NEW* Nick Velvet story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"I want you to steal his cigar," Rancie told Nick.

"His what?"

"Cigar. Tusk has a lucky cigar whenever he plays. He lights up one of those long jobs at the first deal, and if he starts out good that becomes his lucky cigar for the whole game. If it's a long game and the cigar burns down, he puts it out and just keeps the unlit butt in his mouth."

"So what good will it do to steal it?" Nick wanted to know . . .

THE THEFT OF THE LUCKY CIGAR

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Nick Velvet rarely played poker, because he found most forms of gambling to be boring even when he won. But every few months Gloria's brother Arnie held a high-stakes game in the back room of his Greenwich Village restaurant and Nick usually attended when he wasn't working. It was good to come back to the old neighborhood occasionally and mingle with men he'd known for years. Some were salesmen, some were teachers or cops. Others—the ones who sported diamond rings on their pinky fingers—you didn't ask what they did.

They always started with Arnie dealing a hand of stud. This night in early February, there were six of them around the big table with one or two more expected later. Nick took the first pot and his luck increased during the first hour of the game.

"You know this game," said a man named David Rancie, one of those with a diamond ring on his little finger.

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"I've played before," Nick admitted, flipping over his cards to reveal a spade flush.

"I told you he was good," Arnie said, apparently proving some point he'd made earlier.

Rancie, who was a newcomer to their occasional poker games, kept an eye on him through the next half hour of play. When Nick decided to take a break and sit out the next few hands, Rancie did likewise. "Hey," Arnie complained, "it's too early to be quitting!"

"We'll be back," Rancie promised. To Nick, he said, "Arnie's a good guy. He told me you might help with a problem I got."

"I hope he didn't misrepresent me."

"No, I understand it all. You do this sort of thing for a living." They'd drifted into a small adjoining room where Arnie's secretary worked during the day. Rancie sat behind her desk, his broad hips overflowing the narrow chair. "Do you know a man named Jonathan Tusk?"

"Never heard of him."

"He's sort of in the import-export business. A big-time gambler, especially at poker. I'm playing him in a game next week."

"Good luck."

"I need more than luck. I want you to steal his cigar."

"His what?"

"Cigar. Tusk has a lucky cigar whenever he plays. He lights up one of these long jobs at the first deal, and if he starts out good that becomes his lucky cigar for the whole game. If it's a long game and the cigar burns down, he puts it out and just keeps the unlit butt in his mouth."

"So what good will it do to steal it?"

"He's such a superstitious guy, it's sure to unnerve him if he doesn't have it. He'll start betting crazy and losing pots he'd otherwise win."

"My fee is twenty-five thousand," Nick told him. "Is a cigar worth that much to you?"

"These are hundred-grand games I'm talking about, sometimes more."

Nick thought about it. "What's so difficult?" he wanted to know. "Why do you need me?"

"He can't know it's been stolen to unnerve his play. That would ruin the whole thing. And he brings someone with him who's sort of his bodyguard."

"What for? Is Tusk a Mafia leader or something?"

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"No, he's a bit shady, perhaps, but nothing like that. It's just that he's often a big winner and he doesn't want to walk out of there alone in the middle of the night with a load of cash on him."

"Where are you playing?"

"Over in Brooklyn, near the docks. It's a tough neighborhood, even in the daytime. The rest of us are just as happy about having a bodyguard. It keeps the game from being ripped off."

"But you're going to rip it off yourself."

Rancie laughed. "Hell, no! Call it a bit of gamesmanship. I'm just trying to rattle him to give me a better chance. Just even up the odds, that's all. Jonathan Tusk's a damned shrewd poker player."

"How many in the game?"

"Six, but I can make room for you."

"Does Arnie play?"

"No, we're a bit out of his league."

"All right," Nick decided. "I want the time, the address, a description of the room you play in, and information about the other players. Does this so-called bodyguard play?"

"Ember? No, there are just the six regulars. Myself, Tusk, O'Grady, Clinton, Ziegler, and Wasserman. They're all businessmen like myself, looking for a little action. It's just that Tusk usually wins, and it's time he was taken down a peg."

"And I'll be playing in this game?"

"Of course."

"My fee is twenty-five thousand plus expenses. You know what that means?"

"What?"

"You cover my losses in the game."

The game was on the following Friday night, and Rancie hadn't been kidding about the neighborhood. Though the twin towers of the World Trade Center were on view across the East River, the street itself was littered with rubbish bags and permeated by a greasy stench from the exhaust fans of restaurant kitchens. Nick was relieved that the Riverview Social Club provided a fenced-in lot for its guests' cars. He parked and entered the building through the unlocked side door. Rancie was waiting for him.

"Glad you found the place, Nick."

"Will my car be safe out there?"

"Sure—they lock the gate after everyone arrives. Come on upstairs and meet the others."

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Most of the others were assembled in a spacious room with a sink and a small refrigerator against one wall and a large window overlooking the East River. As the introductions were made, Nick realized that his target, Jonathan Tusk, and bodyguard, had not yet arrived. "Mike O'Grady," Rancie said, introducing a red-faced gentleman with a firm handshake. "This is Mike's social club we're using."

"Nick Velvet, eh?" O'Grady said. "I've heard about you."

Nick smiled. "Nothing bad, I hope."

Brian Clinton was the youngest of the men, a handsome, dark-haired fellow in his early thirties. His slim fingers seemed made for playing the piano—or dealing cards. Ziegler and Wasserman turned out to be partners in a Seventh Avenue clothing company, manufacturing women's ready-to-wear dresses for chain stores around the country. Ziegler was already at the round felt-covered table, fooling with a deck of cards. "You handle those like a magician," Nick commented.

The balding man smiled. "Just well enough to amuse the grandchildren with a few card tricks."

Rancie came away from the window. "Tusk just drove in, Ember's right behind him. We can start now."

Nick walked over to Rancie's side and watched while an attendant came out to lock the gate. Jonathan Tusk was a large man wearing a dark-blue topcoat and a hat. His bodyguard looked surprisingly small and boyish next to him, sporting a short leather jacket and a cap.

"About time he got here," Ziegler said, dealing himself a game of solitaire he'd obviously have no time to finish.

As Tusk entered the room, Nick realized that close up he seemed less menacing than at a distance. He had a friendly face and a ready smile, though his dark-brown eyes were deep-set and hooded. "Velvet," he repeated, shaking hands. "Rancie told me about you. Nice you could sit in tonight."

Ember, the bodyguard, entered behind him and took off the cap. Nick wondered why Rancie had neglected to mention the fact that Ember was a woman.

She was probably about thirty, with long black hair that she had kept coiled beneath the cap. Her body was slim and boyish, and her face could best be described as enigmatic. The tight jeans she wore provided no hiding place for a weapon—if she carried one, it had to

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be beneath the short leather jacket, which she showed no sign of removing.

"Mr. Velvet," she murmured, acknowledging his presence with a handshake. He wondered if the whole bodyguard business was some sort of joke and decided that either way she wouldn't present an obstacle to his mission. Her job would be to protect Jonathan Tusk and his money, not his cigar.

The cigar itself appeared almost as soon as Tusk settled down at the table, choosing the chair to the left of Ziegler. It was a long, expensive Havana, illegal in America since the decades-old trade embargo but still available if you knew the right people or traveled occasionally to Canada.

Nick sat across from them, far away from Tusk and his cigar. He found that he had Rancie on his right and Mike O'Grady on his left, with Brian Clinton and Wasserman taking the other two seats. The game was about to begin. Nick glanced over his shoulder and observed Ember lounging against the wall. He wondered if she remained in that position during the entire game. Deciding to be a gentleman, he slipped out of his chair and carried an unused one over to her from the window.

"Here. You might as well sit down."

Her eyebrows went up just a fraction. "Thanks."

"Is Ember your first or last name?"

"First."

"What's the rest of it?"

"Farrell." She was a woman of few words.

"You come to these games often?"

"Now and then."

"But you don't play?"

"I watch."

Nick went back to his seat at the table. The players were cutting cards to establish the first dealer and O'Grady ran through the house rules for Nick's benefit. The game was dealer's choice, one-hundred-dollar limit, though the limit could be waived by unanimous agreement. Apparently this was customary as the night wore on.

Then O'Grady drew the high card and announced that the first game would be five-card stud, nothing wild, ante five dollars. Jonathan Tusk lit his cigar.

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It didn't take Nick long to see the style of Tusk's game. After the first round, he had a queen showing, plus his hole card. The bet was his and he tossed in ten dollars for the others to match. Everyone did, including Nick, who was holding a pair of fives, one of them his hole card.

Nick was dealt a three for his third card—no help—and Tusk got a jack. Along with the queen, it pointed toward a possible straight. He raised the bet to twenty dollars for the next card and Wasserman dropped out.

By the time the last card had been dealt, Tusk showed a nine, jack, queen, and king. If his hole card was a ten, he had a straight. Nick still held his original pair of fives, nothing else. Ziegler, Clinton, and O'Grady all dropped. Rancie remained in with a pair of eights showing. Though he was beaten, Nick decided to stay in, too. After all, it wasn't his money. He tossed in the necessary chips.

But Jonathan Tusk raised the bet again, to fifty dollars. The pot was brimming with chips. Rancie hesitated a moment and then folded. Nick did likewise. Tusk smiled and buried his hand among the discards. As the only remaining player, he didn't have to show it. He might have been bluffing or holding a straight. The pot totaled several hundred dollars and he drew happily on his cigar as he scooped it in.

"This is my lucky one tonight," he proclaimed, removing the cigar from his mouth to rest it on the rim of the heavy ceramic ashtray by his right hand.

They played another dozen hands, switching to draw poker and then back to stud. Though every player won at least a single pot, the big ones all seemed to go to Tusk. A large pile of chips and bills was collecting in front of him. It was his deal again and he paused long enough to sort out the bills and stuff them into his wallet. Then he announced, "Let's make it draw—deuces wild." By this time the cigar had burned more than halfway down, and he stubbed it out before returning it to his mouth. "Got to make it last," he explained, observing Nick's eyes on him. "It's my lucky one for tonight."

He gave a little wink as he spoke, and Nick knew it wasn't directed at him. He turned in time to see Ember Farrell smile slightly. She'd abandoned her chair and was standing again, leaning against the wall near the door. It occurred to Nick that she'd be hidden from view if someone entered the room unexpectedly with a weapon. Maybe she was a good bodyguard, after all.

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Tusk dealt the hand and Nick picked up his five cards. He had a wild deuce that could be played with a ten for a pair. Still, with deuces wild it wasn't that great a hand. He threw away two of his low cards and requested two new ones, the most that were allowed. They were no help. The best he could do was a pair of tens.

After a couple of rounds of raises, only he and Rancie remained in the game against Tusk. The large man bit down hard on his lucky cigar and muttered, "I'll see that bet and raise another hundred." Nick dropped and Rancie called. He had three sevens, but Tusk beat it with a full house, eights and fives. He wasn't a bluffer all the time.

Rancie nudged Nick under the table as Jonathan Tusk shuffled the deck for the next deal. He'd returned the cigar to the ashtray.

Nick waited until the cards were dealt and took out a pack of cigarettes and a matchbox. He'd given up smoking, but this was a special occasion. Carefully lighting the cigarette with a loose match he'd hidden in his hand, he slipped the matchbox under the table and opened it, pressing it against the wood for just an instant. Then he removed it and returned it to his pocket.

They were halfway through the next hand when Wasserman let out a yell. A large hairy spider, as big as a matchbox, had crept over the edge of the table and was running across it, heading directly toward Mike O'Grady. The Irishman yelled, too, and upended the table, sending cards, chips, and ashtrays flying.

As the edge of the table hit the floor, the spider kept on running across its green-felt surface. It had almost reached the top when a slim black throwing knife hit the creature dead center, pinning it to the table.

"Calm down," Ember Farrell told the men, walking over to retrieve her weapon. "I thought it was women who were supposed to be scared of these things."

They disposed of the spider and started sorting out the piles of chips as best they could. "That calls for some beer," Brian Clinton decided. "Where in hell do you think that thing came from, anyhow?" He opened the small refrigerator and took out some cans while Ziegler and Wasserman picked up the table. Ember was washing her knife at the sink.

"My God, Nick," Rancie managed to whisper.

"Shh! It was harmless."

"Yes, but—"

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He was interrupted by a wounded bellow from Jonathan Tusk. "What happened to my cigar? Did somebody throw out my lucky cigar?"

They all assured him they hadn't, but that wasn't good enough for Tusk. He looked through the fragments of broken ashtray that someone had scooped up, then went on to search the entire floor.

"Forget it and light up a new one," Rancie told him. "My God, Jonathan, it's only a cigar."

"But it's my lucky one! You don't understand. I was winning with it tonight."

"You were doing that, all right," O'Grady agreed.

"I still want to know where that spider came from," Clinton said. "This is your building, Mike. Are there others around like that one?"

"It looked like a baby tarantula to me. It probably came up from Central America in a shipment of bananas. You can find almost anything down here around the docks."

The spider had been a full-sized hairy mygalomorph from Puerto Rico, Nick knew, but they were commonly called tarantulas in this country so O'Grady was mostly correct.

Jonathan Tusk had no interest in the spider as he continued to search for his cigar, at that moment in Nick's pocket. Nick was anxious to be rid of it. In the commotion over the spider, no one had noticed him kick it across the floor and then retrieve it. But he didn't want it to be found on him.

He saw that Rancie had drifted outside while the others tried to agree on the ownership of the chips. "You shouldn't have tipped over the table," Ziegler told O'Grady.

"That damned thing was headed right toward me! What would you have done?"

"I'm going out for some fresh air," Nick said. "I didn't have enough on the table to argue about."

He found Rancie downstairs, standing by the open door. The night sounds of the Brooklyn docks seemed very close. "What would you have done if O'Grady didn't upend the table?" Rancie asked.

"I'd have done it myself." Nick handed him the cigar. "Here it is. Do you have the rest of my money?"

Rancie smiled and passed over a thick envelope. "I've covered your losses, too. If you keep playing, they're your responsibility."

"Fair enough."

Rancie studied him in the near-darkness. "Arnie was right—you do good work. Come on, let's go upstairs and win back some of our money from Tusk."

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Everyone had settled down by the time they returned and the chips had been distributed with reasonable accuracy. Ember was pacing in the hallway, acting bored and anxious to be out of there. "Come back inside with us," Nick told her. "We may be attacked by more spiders."

The poker game progressed exactly as Rancie had predicted. Without his lucky cigar, Jonathan Tusk seemed nervous and disoriented. He still glanced around the room from time to time, as if expecting it to materialize. His first few bets were foolhardy, and then he became too cautious, dropping out of a stud game after the second card.

"Light up another cigar," Brian Clinton suggested. "Maybe it'll be another lucky one."

Tusk followed his suggestion, but assured him he'd never had more than one lucky cigar a game. He seemed to be right. If anything, his luck grew worse. Nick recouped some of his losses and Rancie began to win big. Tusk looked utterly downcast.

When it got to be midnight, Ember walked around the table and squeezed his shoulder. "I think we'd better be going."

"One more hand," he said.

Wasserman was dealing and decided to switch back to stud, with nothing wild. Nick's down card was a ten, and the first up card was a jack. He scanned the table and saw he was high. Tusk was showing a four and Rancie had a two. Nick bet fifty dollars and everyone stayed in. His next card was a nine, and it was a heart like the first two: he was in line for a possible straight flush. Next Wasserman dealt him a six of hearts. The possible flush, at least, was still alive. The others began to drop out until only Rancie, Tusk, and Nick remained.

For his final card Nick was dealt a two of hearts. He had his flush. Across the table, Tusk had a second four. Even if there were three of them, Nick had him beaten. After another round of bets, Tusk showed his three fours and Nick revealed his heart flush. Rancie had only a pair of tens.

"I quit," Tusk announced, scooping up his chips as he got to his feet. "Will you cash these in, Mike?"

O'Grady did so reluctantly. "You shouldn't leave so early, Jonathan."

"Maybe next time."

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"Let's all quit," Clinton suggested. "The way Rancie's luck is running, he and Nick here will have everyone's money."

Nick was pleased when the others agreed. His winnings weren't that great, but he had his fee and it had been a profitable night's work. It was best to get out of there before Jonathan Tusk began thinking too much about the appearance of the spider and the disappearance of his lucky cigar.

While Mike O'Grady emptied ashtrays and discarded beer cans, the others put on their coats and started drifting out. Tusk seemed to lag behind, which was fine with Nick. He headed downstairs and found himself walking with Ember Farrell. "You know how to handle a knife. Have you had much experience pinning spiders to poker tables?"

She laughed. "It was a first for me. I probably should have squashed it with my shoe."

"The knife was much more effective. Are you Tusk's girl?"

"I'm his bodyguard when he goes out gambling."

They'd paused at the bottom of the stairs and Ziegler and Wasserman walked past them to the parking lot. A couple of the others could be heard talking on the stairs.

"What does he do for a living?"

"Import-export," she answered vaguely. Then she patted her sleeve and swore.

"What's the matter?"

"I forgot my knife. After I washed it off, I left it lying by the sink while I helped Jonathan search for his cigar. I'll have to go back up for it."

Nick wasn't certain about the etiquette of retrieving a woman bodyguard's weapon for her, so he let her lead the way and followed along.

Clinton passed them on the stairs with a mumbled goodnight. Mike O'Grady stood at the top, dangling a key chain. "I'll lock up as soon as everyone's out," he told Ember. "Want to see about Jonathan?"

A toilet down the hall flushed and Rancie came out, looking a bit tired. "Time to head for home," he said.

Ember opened the door of the room where the poker game had been held. "He must be in here."

Nick heard her give a gasp like a scream cut short, and saw over her shoulder the toppled figure of Jonathan Tusk, sitting on the

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floor with his back against the wall, Ember's throwing knife through his heart . . .

"We have to avoid a scandal at all costs," Ziegler was saying. He and Wasserman had been called back upstairs while they sat waiting for someone to unlock the gate.

"Why should there be a scandal?" Nick asked. "There are only seven of us here and one of us killed him. If someone will confess, the rest of us can be home in an hour."

"Nick," David Rancie said, "it's not that simple. Tusk's death will make big headlines."

"Why? Because we were having a poker game?"

"Because of who he is," Rancie said.

"I thought he was import-export."

"Mostly export."

"So? That helps our balance of payments, doesn't it?"

Rancie sighed. "You'd better tell him, Ember."

Her expression was blank as she said, "He's an arms merchant—or was. He sold weapons in the Middle East and to various Third World countries. There's nothing illegal about it."

"Not illegal, but unsavory," Brian Clinton suggested. "The newspapers would play it up, looking for political motives."

"What other motives are there?" O'Grady asked. "No one killed him for his money. He ended up the big loser tonight."

"In more ways than one," Rancie agreed.

Nick was watching him from the corner of his eye, wondering if he'd been used as a patsy in some scheme to implicate him in the murder. These others knew each other. Only Rancie knew him, and not very well.

"The police must be called," Ember said.

"Not just yet." Clinton moved to the front, acting as sort of spokesman. "We need to establish what happened, who was where when Tusk was killed."

But that was easier said than done. No one admitted to being the last one in the room with Tusk. "Maybe he stabbed himself," Wasserman suggested, "in remorse over losing tonight."

A few of them laughed at that one. "Look," Mike O'Grady said, "we've known each other a long time. We've been having these poker sessions for—what?—a year now? If any of us wanted to kill him, we wouldn't have done it here. I think he was set up for a hit." His eyes were on Nick as he spoke. "What line of business are you in, Velvet?"

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It was Rancie who answered. "He's a salesman, a relative of Arnie's. You all know Arnie."

The men exchanged glances. It was as if Nick's fate was being weighed. "There's no point in calling the police until we know what happened," Clinton argued. "We've got to have a killer."

"How's about Ember?" Ziegler suggested.

"She was with me on the stairs," Nick said. "She couldn't have killed him."

"She might have thrown the knife from the doorway. We've all seen that she's quite skillful at it."

"I didn't kill him," Ember said. "My job was to protect him."

"But it was your knife."

"I'd washed it off and left it by the sink. Any of you might have used it."

Ziegler had another idea. "Maybe that tarantula was an attempt to kill Tusk. When that failed, the killer was forced to use a knife."

"The spider might have bitten any of us," Nick pointed out. "Besides, I don't think it was poisonous."

"You seem to know all about it. Maybe you brought it."

"Cut it out, Ziegler," Rancie ordered. "Nick is my guest. He had less reason to kill Tusk than any of us. He just met him tonight."

"We've waited too long already," O'Grady decided. "This is my place and I'm calling the police."

The night seemed interminable as they were questioned together and individually by the detectives assigned to the investigation. There were no fingerprints on the knife, and no other obvious clues to the killer's identity. As Nick peered through the open door from the room across the hall where they waited their turns for questioning, he saw one of the detectives starting to search through the evening's rubbish. He asked Rancie, "What did you do with the cigar butt?" They were alone in the room, the last to be called.

"I threw it away, of course. I didn't want it—I just wanted Tusk not to have it."

"In that wastebasket?"

"I think so, after the game ended."

Nick watched the detective carefully. "It's not there now."

Rancie turned to him. "You think I stabbed Tusk, don't you?"

"I don't know. I'm no detective." But as Nick sat thinking about the poker game, an idea began to form in his mind. He was remembering how close-mouthed Ember Farrell had been when he first met her.

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As if in answer to his thoughts, she appeared in the doorway, released by the investigators. She'd taken off the leather jacket and carried it over one arm. "I'm free to go now," she told them.

Nick got to his feet. "I'll walk downstairs with you."

One of the detectives in the hall cautioned, "You can't leave the building."

"I don't intend to."

As they walked down the steps, his hand touched the sheath strapped to her arm. "They wouldn't give it back?"

She shrugged. "It was the murder weapon, after all."

"What did you have to do with his death?"

"Nothing, except that I failed to prevent it. I never thought he'd be in danger from one of them inside the building."

"He usually won the poker games, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"With help from you?"

She turned sharply, regarding him with her veiled dark eyes. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I'm not a big poker player, but I know a crooked game when I see one. Besides, I don't believe in lucky cigars or rabbits' feet or any of that nonsense. Tusk's luck changed too rapidly after he lost his cigar. It especially changed in relationship to Rancie and me, the players seated directly across from him. You were behind us. You could see into our hands, especially when you were standing as you were most of the time."

"Surely you must know I didn't talk or signal to him in any way."

"That's exactly what you did do. I thought about it, trying to figure how it could be done. If the cigar was part of it, what was the other part? And then I remembered how quiet you were before the game, speaking only in monosyllables. You had a tiny electronic transmitter hidden in your mouth, not unlike the car-door openers some people have on their keychains. It only transmits a signal about twenty feet, but that was more than enough for Tusk's purposes.

"The receiver, which probably gave off a slight vibration when activated, was in the butt end of his cigar, which he clamped firmly between his teeth. That was why he couldn't let the cigar burn down too far and damage it. You pressed the transmitter with your tongue or teeth, sending coded messages—to identify the player and then the cards in his hand. I suppose it was one vibration for an ace, on up to thirteen for a king, with special combinations for hands like a full house or a flush.

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"You couldn't see the hands of all the players, of course, but then Tusk couldn't win every time, anyway, without attracting undue suspicion. The system just gave him an edge, and over several hours' play he usually emerged the winner."

She was silent for a moment, considering her options. "You're pretty smart. I'll need a new partner with Jonathan dead."

Nick laughed. "It's not my game, but thanks for the offer. Did you kill him?"

"No. Whoever found the cigar butt must have guessed the truth and done that."

Nick thought about his client, David Rancie. He held the door open for Ember at the foot of the stairs. "Tusk must have been a wealthy man. Why did he bother cheating at cards?"

"Some men will always cheat," she said, studying him with her shrewd eyes. "They like the challenge of it."

It was another hour before the detectives finished questioning Rancie and Nick. They sealed the crime room itself but told O'Grady he could use the rest of the building.

"I'm heading home," Rancie told Nick. "I didn't know it would turn out like this, but thanks for the help, anyway."

"Did you know Tusk was cheating?"

Rancie's eyes came up suddenly, truly surprised. "What do you mean?"

"Ember was looking into our hands and transmitting coded vibrations to his cigar."

"Are you serious?"

"I thought you knew. Didn't you examine the cigar?"

"I told you I threw it away."

Somehow Nick believed him. He didn't seem the sort to do things on the spur of the moment. If he'd discovered Tusk was cheating, he'd have dealt with it later. If he'd wanted to kill him, he'd have hired it done, the way he hired Nick.

"Did Ember tell you about the cigar?" Rancie asked.

"She confirmed what I'd guessed."

"That gal is cold as ice. Did you see the way she pinned that spider to the table with her knife? I'd hate to be the one who killed Tusk while she was supposed to be guarding him."

Mike O'Grady came out of the building with the detectives and finished locking up. "They got no leads," he told Nick and Rancie. "It could have been any one of us."

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But as he said the words, Nick had a clear image of him picking up after the game, emptying ashtrays, disposing of beer cans. "Not anyone, O'Grady. It was you. While you were cleaning up, you found Tusk's cigar in the wastebasket. You saw the little electronic vibrator that had probably broken through the side of the tobacco wrapping."

"You're crazy."

But Nick could see by the expression on Rancie's face that he believed it. "Sure, Mike. It's your place. You did all the cleaning up. You're the only one who could have found it after I threw it away."

O'Grady shrugged. The police were gone now and no one was going to prove it, anyway. "Hell, nobody gets away with cheating at my place. It was an honest, friendly game until Tusk came along. When I showed him the cigar, he just smiled and dared me to do something about it. So I picked up the knife and stuck him."

"Will you tell the police?" Nick asked.

"Hell, what for? He had it coming."

It was the following week when Gloria showed Nick the item in the newspaper. "Nicky, isn't this one of the men you played poker with the other night? Mike O'Grady?"

"What about him?" Nick asked, taking the paper.

"He was killed in a one-car crash up in the Bronx. He ran into a bridge abutment."

Nick read the account and went back to his coffee. O'Grady had been alone in the car. Nick wasn't about to believe that O'Grady had developed a guilty conscience. He remembered the dead spider and what Rancie had said about Ember Farrell. The only question in Nick's mind was whether Rancie had told her or if she'd figured it out for herself.

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EQMM 50TH ANNIVERSARY CONTEST

Have you the previous forty questions solved for submission to us along with the five below and the final five you will find in the October issue? See the facing page to familiarize yourself with the rules and other details relating to the contest.

41. Clark Howard won EQMM's Readers Award three times to date. Before that, a short story of his published in EQMM won the Edgar from the Mystery Writers of America. What is the title of that story?

42. The EQMM Readers Award has also been won by a Canadian. Her/his name?

43. And by an English writer. Her/his name?

44. Who won the first Ellery Queen Award from the Mystery Writers of America?

45. Name the two men who collaborated to write under the pseudonym of Ellery Queen.

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First Prize: Limited-edition poster of *EQMM*'s first cover
Fifty Years of the Best from Ellery Queen, edited by Eleanor Sullivan, published by Carroll & Graf
Ellery Queen 50th Anniversary mug
The option to appear on a cover of *EQMM* with a celebrity of the winner's choice who agrees to said cover

Second and Third Prizes: Limited-edition poster of *EQMM*'s first cover

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The winner will be the top scorer in answering 50 questions related to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*—there will be 5 questions an issue from January through October 1991. In case of a tie, the earliest postmark will determine the winner. The deadline is October 15, 1991—entries should carry a postmark no later than that date.

All 50 questions must be submitted as a unit, the pages or copies of the pages for all ten issues together. Material sent in sections will not be considered. Only one entry will be allowed per person. All entries must include the contestant's legal name and full address. No entries will be returned, even if accompanied by a return envelope. Winners will be notified by mail and announced in the March 1992 issue. (No phone calls, please.)

Contributors to *EQMM* are not eligible to win the contest, nor are employees and their immediate families of Davis Publications, Inc., Carlson Promotion Group, or any of their affiliated agents, advertising, and promotional production agencies. All applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations apply.

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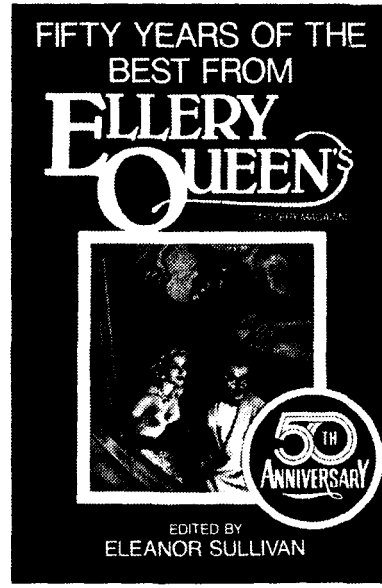

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Bruce Holland Rogers teaches writing and literature at the University of Colorado. His fiction has appeared in Woman's World, The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, The New Mexico Humanities Review, *and* Quarterly West. *The following story is a great example of how a familiar premise can be turned inside out . . .*

SNAPPING OUT OF IT

by BRUCE HOLLAND ROGERS

He felt emptied out as he walked along the dark beach. Did he always feel this way after he killed someone? He couldn't remember.

He stopped walking for a moment to think about it, to try to remember. The sea was grey and the shore was a long curving line of black. Orange light tinted the farthest clouds, and the wind tousled his hair. It felt good.

The Sea Breeze terrace was up ahead. He could stop there to watch the sun rise. Of course, they'd look for him there. They always did. *Blake* always did.

Thinking of Blake made it easier to remember.

Dr. Weber was the first. They had argued about his medication. He didn't want to take it any more, but Dr. Weber insisted.

There were pillows on the couch and Dr. Weber wasn't a strong man. It wasn't all that hard to hold one of those pillows against his face until he stopped struggling.

After he killed Dr. Weber, he had walked to the beach. He liked the salt smell and the sound of the waves rolling in. The beach relaxed him. He walked all the way to the big hotels.

But they found him. When he stopped to rest at the Sea Breeze terrace, Blake came with the van and took him back to the Center. On the way, he told Blake all about the murder.

After Dr. Weber was Nurse Fitzgerald. She wanted him to get out of his room and visit with the others in the lounge. "Craig," she told

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him, "it doesn't do you any good to be alone so much. Now come on."

But he didn't come on. Instead he strangled her, hid her body under the bed, and then slipped out the window. He walked off the grounds and down to the beach.

Blake found him at the Sea Breeze terrace. Again, he told Blake all about it.

"You don't fool me, Craig," Blake told him. "You don't fool me for a minute. You could snap out of it if you wanted to. So snap out already. I've got better things to do than chase after you and haul you back, okay?"

But Nurse Fitzgerald wasn't the last. There was the fat guy in the dining room who wanted to talk when Craig didn't want to talk. Craig blew him up with dynamite. And then there was Dr. Weber again. He was still being pushy about Craig's medication, so Craig drowned him in the fountain out front.

"Craig, just stop it!" Blake said as they drove back. "I have a lot of things to do. What if everybody at the Center just decided to walk away?"

"I killed Dr. Weber," Craig said.

"You didn't kill anybody," said Blake.

"Oh yes I did. I pushed him into the fountain and held him under. You'll see. When we get back, the police will come for me."

"Uh-huh. Just like the last time you killed Dr. Weber? When you suffocated him? But he was there at the Center, waiting for us when I drove you back, wasn't he? And Nurse Fitzgerald was fine after you killed her, right?"

"That was different. I *really* killed him this time."

"Craig," Blake said, "you wouldn't kill anybody. You're harmless. You're not even very crazy. You just don't want to be responsible. I've worked at the Center a long time, and I can tell. You're the kind who chooses to be crazy."

"*I really killed Dr. Weber.* He's floating in the fountain. You'll see."

"Craig, who do you think told me to find you and drive you back?"

Craig looked at Blake, uncertainty in his gaze.

"It was Dr. Weber," Blake said. " 'Looks like Craig's gone for a stroll on the beach, Blake. Would you mind driving him home?' " Blake shook his head. "The thing is, I do mind. I mind because I shouldn't have to do this."

Craig was looking at his hands, twisting his fingers nervously.

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"Life at the Center is just too easy for you," Blake went on. "You're not willing to face things. Being crazy is an excuse to be irresponsible."

"You shouldn't talk to me this way," Craig said.

"Why not?"

"Dr. Weber wouldn't like it."

"Aha! He has to be alive to not like it, doesn't he?"

Craig frowned and twisted his fingers some more. "He wouldn't like it. You're just an orderly, and you shouldn't talk to me this way."

"Listen," Blake went on, "I know how you feel. Life is hard. Look at me, for instance. I'm married, but it's no good any more. My wife and I, we might as well live on different planets. We stay together for the kids. I've got five, and it's expensive keeping them in clothes and braces and stuff. So I work two jobs. You'd think I'd get some appreciation for that at home—"

Blake's knuckles were white on the steering wheel.

"Well, anyway," he said, relaxing his grip, "the point is that we all have something to run away from, don't we? I mean, don't you think I'd like to be crazy and have people take care of me?"

"I don't like you," said Craig.

"You can hate me," said Blake, "so long as you make my life a little easier, okay? If you can't snap out of it, then at least quit running away from the Center! Don't make me drive up to get you any more!"

"I don't like you at all," Craig said.

Neither of them spoke during the rest of the drive.

He used a tire iron. They were back on the grounds of the Center, and he picked up the tire iron and thought about Blake's five kids and the braces and the clothes and the wife from another planet. It all made him furious somehow. He brought the tire iron down hard.

He knew they'd look for him on the beach. He hid in a culvert until dark.

This time he'd done it. He'd really done it.

After dark, the pull of the beach was irresistible. He had walked slowly along the strip of wet sand, thinking about it. It was real this time. He had killed Blake.

Or had he? Now, as he walked up the steps to the Sea Breeze terrace, he thought about what Blake had said, the stuff about choosing to be crazy. Or not.

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Maybe he hadn't killed Blake. Maybe, when the sun rose, Blake would come with the van. He sat down on the terrace to consider not being crazy any more.

But as the sun climbed into the sky, it wasn't Blake who came. It was Dr. Weber.

The psychiatrist came and sat down beside him and said, "I had a feeling you might come here."

"I expected Blake, Dr. Weber. It's always Blake who comes."

Dr. Weber hesitated like he was about to say something and changed his mind. "This time, it's me," he said simply.

For a moment, he was afraid. "Blake's alive, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Dr. Weber. "Blake's alive."

On the drive back, he told Dr. Weber about what Blake had said. Maybe it was true. Maybe he could snap out of it.

Dr. Weber looked at him thoughtfully.

"Blake's right, isn't he, Doc? People can decide to stop being crazy, can't they?"

"Not necessarily," said Dr. Weber as he drove onto the grounds of the Center. "But in your case, perhaps."

"Then I'm going to do it," he said. "I'm going to snap out of it. I'm going to take responsibility."

There were two police cars in the circular drive. Dr. Weber got out and talked to the officers. When the psychiatrist came back to his car, the policemen came with him.

Again, he was afraid. "You said Blake was alive!"

The policemen looked at each other.

"Yes, he is," said Dr. Weber. "Blake's alive."

"I didn't hit him with the tire iron?"

"No," said Dr. Weber. "But you have to go away with Officer Garner, here. You have to answer some questions. All right?"

Detective Kelly frowned as the squad car drove away. "Doc, are you sure he isn't faking?"

Weber shook his head. "I doubt very much that he is."

"But I don't get it. You said he was perfectly sane."

"No, I didn't," Weber said. "Sanity's a legal concept, not a medical one. I said he had a well integrated, healthy personality when he came to work for the Center. All of our employees are tested."

"Well, what happened to him?"

"It's a hazard of working with the mentally disturbed, Detective. One can begin to identify with their symptoms. It's not that psycho-

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sis is catching, exactly. But with an existing predisposition—"

"So Blake really thinks he's Craig Brown, the man he killed?"

"Apparently so."

Kelly shook his head. "Well, I'm no expert. I guess the DA's psychiatrists will judge if he's responsible for his actions. They'll know if he's really crazy."

"Mmm." Weber nodded thoughtfully. "If Blake hasn't talked himself out of it by then."

DETECTIVERSE

WHAT DID IT

by GLORIA ROSENTHAL

Whenever he started to read a mystery,
His wife told him the story's history.
"The neighbor did it," she said with glee,
Or "The maid who worked in the scullery,"
"The gardener did it with his hoe,"
"The wife's lover killed him, don't you know."
Over the years, it was always the same—
Before page 2, he knew who to blame.
And then one day the man exploded,
Picked up a gun he knew was loaded,
Shot her once through the back of the head,
And when he was sure the old gal was dead
He wiped off the weapon and carefully hid it
And said to her corpse, "It's the husband who did it."

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BRASS KNUCKLES

by RUPERT HOLMES

Working out of Homicide,
They told me Joe Vanelli died.
We'd been a team for seven years,
His widow wouldn't waste her tears.
Who done it, no one seemed to care,
'Cause crooked cops foul-up the air.
But since I worked so long with Joe,
I felt I had the right to know.

I found a club in Malibu
He'd gone when he felt black and blue.
For twenty bucks in petty cash,
The hatcheck girl spilled out some trash
And in her tale, I heard a name
That rang a gong to save the game:
A congressman named Thorley Doakes
Who had a place in Sherman Oaks.

Step softly, gumshoe, you're out of your class:
You're treading mighty barefoot and there's glass in the grass.
Brass knuckles won't help you when your hands ain't clean:
Rubber hoses, broken noses are a trenchcoat scene,
And you ain't dressed for this affair—
You're breathing rarified air.

Up through the lush estate I wheeled,
A servant made me show my shield.
The Congressman conversed with me;
He flashed a smile convincingly
And said he'd not a thing to hide—
Which told me right away he lied,
'Cause how could he afford the rent
Unless he'd somewhat over-spent?

Then down the stairs came Mrs. Doakes,
The kind who takes off ermine cloaks.

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She'd left her furs upon her bed
And slipped on angel lace instead.
Her husband left to get a drink.
Her eyes sped up the way I think.
I figured Doakes had murdered Joe
When blackmailed for his kneading dough.

Brass knuckles copper, you've fallen in love.
You're near the rim of hell, but you see heaven above.
Brass knuckles won't help you, but the light touch will.
Pistol holder, chip on shoulder, with your guts set to spill,
You think that justice owes you thanks—
Your brain is loaded with blanks.

The angel fell, heavenly.
She sank her body into me.
Her form aligned itself with mine,
(My double-breasted suit fit fine).
I told her I'd an agile brain.
I spelled the truth out clean and plain:
I'd take her husband in that night.
I hoped he'd come without a fight.

That's when the angel stole my gun,
And said, "I hate to spoil your fun."
Then laughing, she explained to me
The murderer was none but she.
A love affair with Joe had tired,
And six shots into him, she'd fired.
The Congressman, (a jerk, like me),
Had covered up to keep her free.

"So goodbye, shamus, I'll aim for the chest.
The bullet ought to enter near the top of your vest.
You lost your heart already, so you won't feel the pain.
Brass knuckles, brass knuckles, and a brass-headed brain!
Take a breath, prepare to crash:
You'll see a bright, blinding flash—"

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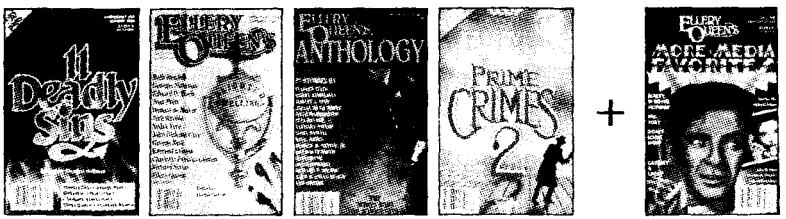

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a *NEW* short story by

DONALD OLSON

As a criminal, a case might have been made for Guy as being the victim of an emotional disorder, stemming from grief, from a sense of injustice so acute, a feeling of loss so profound, he might have been grouped with those normally law-abiding individuals whose single aberrations are said to have occurred "while the balance of the mind was disturbed." For greed was not the motive behind his venture into embezzlement. . . .

A SENSE OF INJUSTICE

by DONALD OLSON

Shortly before noon, Mrs. Berlinghoff, the elderly beneficiary of one of the testamentary trust accounts under Guy Pattern's supervision, bustled up to his desk and began a lengthy, muddled expostulation about some irregularity in one of her savings accounts. Guy listened patiently and explained it must have been a simple misunderstanding. "You'll have to talk to them upstairs. Mr. Niesmith's in charge of cashier operations. I'm sure if you talk to him—"

"Niesmith! The one who grins all the time? Pity me, dear. Find out what they've done with my money. You're always able to explain things to me so clearly."

Guy called upstairs. He was right, it was a simple computer error. The old lady's eyes twinkled gratitude. "I knew you could straighten it out. I do hope the bank realizes what an absolute *jewel* and *genius* you are."

After her departure, Guy spent several minutes pondering the Berlinghoff Trust file. So far he'd been able to resist the temptation it offered, considering it unwise to fiddle with any account whose

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owner, although a bit gaga, was inclined to be meddlesome. It more often amused than worried him how easy it had all been. Mrs. Berlinghoff was quite wrong, of course—he was no genius. But then, certain activities didn't require genius, only a combination of special talents and ready access to the data and facilities, primitive though they were by modern banking standards, of the Union Bank and Trust Company.

Guy looked up and saw Norma Grover watching him from her desk in the corner. Norma occupied a position slightly below Guy's in the Trust Department's pecking order. She was blonde, single, moderately attractive, bright, and ambitious. Guy had admired the adroitness with which she'd picked his brains when she first joined the staff, although recently he'd begun to wonder if her interest might be more personal. This wasn't the first time he'd caught her regarding him with that slyly speculative look he'd encountered from other female employees who found his somber good looks and tantalizing remoteness attractive. And now that his wife had been dead for over a year, he was fair game, wasn't he?

Guy had given up the house after Clare died, that bright little two-bedroom box which had held all their dreams for the future, packed too many memories, and in the end betrayed too many promises. He'd taken a small apartment, dropped most of their friends, and withdrawn into himself. He'd come home from work, eat a solitary meal, watch a little TV, drink too much wine, and read himself to sleep. With nothing for the mind to feed on but memories of Clare, it wasn't a way of life conducive to healing a wounded spirit or curing the savage ache of loss. Dead were all his hopes and dreams and ambitions.

All save one, that is. Yet that one was enough to give purpose to his days.

As a criminal, a case might have been made for Guy as being the victim of an emotional disorder stemming from grief, from a sense of injustice so acute, a feeling of loss so profound, he might have been grouped with those normally law-abiding individuals whose single aberrations are said to have occurred "while the balance of the mind was disturbed." For greed was not the motive behind his venture into embezzlement. It was born of a desire for revenge, of a need to blame someone for Clare's death, someone more accessible than any dark angel of disease.

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Brian Niesmith, whose act of treachery had occurred during Clare's final battle for life, became the focus of Guy's resentment, the inspiration for his reckless game of embezzlement-for-vengeance, a game simplified by the peculiar small-town character of the bank itself, which in many ways might have been called an embezzler's dream. Eventually its swollen cash assets would make it a prime target for takeover by one of the financial giants, who would streamline its operations and introduce sophisticated safeguards to thwart any but the most audacious embezzler.

Meanwhile, in four short months Guy's ingenuity had succeeded in plundering five separate trust accounts to the tune of three hundred thousand dollars, now converted into cash and secreted under another name in a safe-deposit box in a bank then miles away. Except for giving his notice and picking up the money, the game was over.

Or so he thought.

Norma Grover took Guy by surprise one afternoon as he was leaving the bank. "I wonder if you'd do me an enormous favor," she said. "I've got a problem that's been worrying me. Would it be possible for us to have a drink together before going home?"

Neither in tone nor expression did she betray even a shade of coquetry, and as Guy could invent no excuse to put her off he agreed to meet her at the Willow Tree Lounge three blocks from the bank.

She said nothing until their drinks arrived, and then, without touching hers, she sat staring past Guy as if assembling her thoughts.

"So what's this problem?" he asked, with an obvious glance at his watch. "Something to do with your work at the bank?" He hoped that was the case—anything more personal could only prove awkward.

She looked at him now and smiled. "More to do with *your* work at the bank, Guy."

He found the remark enigmatic but no more ominous than her smile. "*My* work? I don't understand."

"The point is, I *do*," she said smoothly. "Understand, I mean. You might say I've been doing a little extracurricular work in the Department. Quite by chance I discovered certain—irregularities. In your accounts. You've been frightfully clever, Guy, but I'm not exactly an amateur myself."

As Guy listened with mounting consternation, Norma revealed in precise detail an astonishing knowledge of Guy's illicit manipula-

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tions. Only when she'd finished speaking did she take a first sip of her drink.

Guy made no attempt to deny her charges. What was the point? "You've spoken to Bradshaw, I assume," he said quietly. Bradshaw was assistant vice-president in charge of Trust.

She made a dismissive gesture. "Would I be telling you this if I had?"

"Then why *are* you telling me?"

She leaned forward, faintly smiling. "When I said I'm no amateur, I meant I've played the occasional game myself now and then at other banks where I've worked. Penny-ante games, but quite successful. That's why I was fishing. U.B.T. was obviously ripe for plucking. All those fat trust accounts and not even an internal auditor. But since you got there before me, well—"

"So you're talking blackmail?"

"Let's call it insurance." She drew a slip of paper from her bag and slid it across the table. "If my arithmetic's correct, this is what I calculate to be the rough sum of your—appropriations."

The figure was surprisingly accurate. She was even sharper than Guy had imagined.

Her smile was now invitingly coy. "So where is it?"

"Suppose I told you I've gambled it all away."

"Please, Guy, don't insult my intelligence. I've learned a lot about you. You've become a loner since your wife died. You live modestly. No, you're not the high-roller type. What were you planning to do? Skip to South America?"

"Europe, actually. Maybe Spain."

Norma wrinkled her nose. "A fugitive for the rest of your life? How dreary."

"No choice, I'm afraid." He hesitated, feeling an urge to justify his actions, to put into words what he could never talk to anyone about before. "You may not believe this, but I didn't do it for the money. Not at first. I suppose what I wanted was some sort of revenge."

"Revenge?"

Guy found himself pouring out the whole story. How he'd been working upstairs as a teller when Clare first got sick. He described those harrowing weeks, the swift progress of the disease. And the incident of the check.

A stranger had presented it, a sizable check on an out-of-town bank. The man had no account at U.B.T. Guy had told him Brian Niesmith would have to okay it. When the man returned, the check

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bore Niesmith's initials. Guy had cashed it. Moments later the hospital had called—or so he was told by Niesmith, who claimed to have taken the message. Guy had rushed out, leaving Niesmith standing in for him. Clare's condition was unchanged, but such was Guy's relief that he hadn't bothered to confirm whether the hospital had actually called. Why should Niesmith have lied about it?

The check had not bounced. Far worse, it had simply disappeared. The last Guy had seen of it had been when he'd put it in his drawer before dashing from the bank. Niesmith had denied okaying any such check for payment. Of course, everyone knew the state of mind Guy was in at the time. It was his word against Brian's, and Brian's uncle was on the bank's board of directors. The whole affair was smoothed over, but Guy was transferred out of cash operations into Trust.

"I'll never know what it was all about," he told Norma Grover. "All I know is that Brian lied. The guy's a crook. That's when I got the idea of framing him as he'd framed me. He'd worked in Trust for three years before moving upstairs. He could have done what I did. I intended to set him up, then watch him squirm."

Guy finished his drink, shrugged, and regarded Norma with a look of bitter amusement. "I've been told that Brian and I look enough alike to be taken for brothers. I cooked up this elaborate scheme based on impersonation, false IDs, juggled bank accounts. A really far-out plot. Well, I soon realized it would never work. It was crazy. So what it boils down to is that I decided to take the money and run."

Whether Norma believed his story he couldn't tell, but she was obviously intrigued by it. "I like the idea of letting Niesmith carry the can. Pity it wouldn't have worked. You wouldn't end up a fugitive. But you didn't answer my question. Where's the loot?"

"Safe-deposit box in another bank. In cash."

"In *cash*? My God."

"It seemed best, for the time being."

"Well, I'm not greedy, Guy. All I want is half. Agreed?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"And I want to hold the key to the safe-deposit box."

Guy laughed. "Forget it."

"Guy, we have to protect our own interests. Consider yourself lucky I'm the one who tripped you up. And you've nothing to worry about. I'm not asking you the name of the bank. I simply insist on

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holding the key until we divvy up the money. You can give it to me tomorrow at work."

As he rose to leave, she said: "Just a minute. Sit down. What you said about Niesmith gives me an idea. Maybe I *can* contribute something. Only fair, right? Could be there just might be a way we *could* tie the can to that slimeball."

"Impossible. If there'd been a way, I would have done it."

She leaned back in the booth with an archly superior smile. "He's a womanizer—you know that, I suppose. He was quick to hit on me when I worked upstairs."

"Hardly flattering. He'll move on anything in a skirt."

"I wasn't flattered—or interested. But it does give me the germ of an idea."

"Like what?"

"I don't think you'd approve. Instinct tells me you're basically a pretty straight guy. No, let me think about it. I owe it to you."

Again he rose. "Please don't do me any favors."

"Maybe I can't," she replied. "It all depends on Brian." Her smile was chilling. "Don't forget the key."

The following two weeks passed swiftly as Guy, with growing agitation, made his plans for departure and transporting the money. He decided on a flight to Switzerland, where he foresaw no difficulty in depositing his share of the embezzled funds, with Spain his eventual destination. Beyond that, he chose not to speculate. He had begun to cultivate a fatalism which until now had been quite foreign to his nature.

That weekend an incident occurred that brought Guy's underlying uneasiness to the surface. It had become his habit to enjoy one meal a week at a good restaurant in town. As he was hurrying through the rain to his car on Saturday night after leaving the restaurant, he saw two people get out of a taxi in front of the Marbury Hotel. The woman waited under the marquee while her companion paid the driver. The woman was Norma Grover, and as the man took her arm and led her into the hotel Guy recognized Brian Niesmith.

Despite Norma's professed dislike of Niesmith and her vague hints about using her charms to set him up, Guy's immediate feeling was one of betrayal. He didn't trust Norma any farther than he trusted Brian. Was it inconceivable that she and Brian were conspiring to expose him, waiting only until Guy revealed the whereabouts of the embezzled funds? Or even more likely, were they planning to

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doublecross him and seize the money for themselves, setting him up to take the fall? Perhaps he was getting paranoid, but he was glad now he hadn't made the mistake of trusting Norma with the name of the bank where he'd stashed the money.

He waited until shortly after midnight and then called Norma's number, surprised when he found her at home.

"So you didn't spend the night with him," he said.

"Who is this?"

"Guy. Or is your friend with you now?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I saw you earlier tonight. You and Niesmith, going into the Marbury arm in arm."

"So?"

"So what sort of game are you playing, Norma? Or should I ask what sort of game are you and Niesmith playing?"

Derisive laughter crackled over the wire. "I told you I had an idea, remember? One you wouldn't approve of?"

"Try me."

"Not yet, I'm still laying the groundwork. I told you I didn't fancy living the life of a fugitive. If my plan works, it won't be necessary."

"Are you crazy? There's no way in the world you can set Brian up."

Her tone remained lightly amused, faintly admonishing. "I'm a woman, Guy—not that you seem to have noticed. I have resources you don't have."

"I fail to see what your throwing yourself at Niesmith can serve to accomplish."

"Like I said, groundwork. And you said it yourself, Brian could just as easily have milked those accounts as you did. He was in Trust before moving upstairs. He might not be as clever as you, but he had every opportunity."

"I still don't see—"

"Trust me, partner, you will. Now go to bed and dream of what you'll do with all that lovely lolly. Leave the rest to me."

At this point, something extraordinary and unforeseeable happened. As if by some ineluctable process of mind, Guy became aware almost overnight of a total change of attitude. It was as if a certain emotional obstacle, blinding his moral vision, had suddenly been removed, revealing the game he'd been playing for what it was: a mad, dangerous stunt, the consequence of having been poisoned by

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some drug brewed in his own grief-stricken brain, a drug composed of loneliness and resentment and the bitterness of loss. God, I must have been crazy, he thought. All the time and mental energy and twisted emotion he'd wasted on the bizarre scheme astonished and sickened him. How could he possibly have believed it might be the means of creating not only a new life but a whole new persona? How could stealing from the bank punish the unfairness of fate or redress his own grievance against life?

Was it too late, he wondered, to call the whole thing off? To put away the pieces and fold up the game, restore those plundered funds to the accounts from which they'd been skimmed? The longer he thought about it, the more strongly convinced he became that it *wasn't* impossible, that it might not be too late. He had the entire holiday weekend, three days of solitude in which to ponder the mechanics of it.

It would mean trouble with Norma, of course, but what could she do about it? Blab to Bradshaw out of spite, pretend she had discovered the embezzlement and played along with Guy merely to gain his confidence before exposing him? Well, let her. Would the consequences be any more painful to bear than living as a fugitive, constantly on the razor edge of uncertainty?

For that matter, *would* the consequences be all that painful? As Guy knew, the banking industry, more than any other, is obliged to create a mystique of inviolable trust and confidence—even the cardinal sins of misappropriation seldom were exposed to public scrutiny. Criminal prosecution is more often the exception than the rule. Only the most spectacular cases of fraud and embezzlement were likely to make the headlines.

Stoutly resolved to do what he must, Guy waited until Sunday afternoon before calling Norma and insisting that she meet him in the pavilion at Glenview Park.

He detected an undertone of repressed excitement in her response: "Has someone called you? Someone from the bank?"

"Called me? No. Why should they?"

"Good. I've been calling you all morning, but you didn't answer."

"I went for a long drive." Actually, he'd gone to the cemetery with flowers for Clare's grave. "Can you meet me at the park in half an hour?"

When he arrived at the park, he found her waiting for him on a bench in the trellised pavilion overlooking the lagoon, dressed as if

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she'd just come from church and wearing a smile of pious complacency. Guy was aware of his own disheveled appearance after a sleepless night. He had rehearsed what he was going to say, and before losing his nerve or giving her a chance to open her mouth he plunged in, explaining why he couldn't go through with the plan, insisting it had been from the very start a madness produced by some fever in his brain which had now cooled, that to proceed would surely end in their own destruction and that nothing Norma could do or say would alter his decision.

She listened to him calmly, her features as serenely untroubled as the glasslike waters of the lagoon. Only when he fell silent did she give him a sidelong look of amused contempt.

"How very noble, Guy. But I'm afraid you're too late."

"You're wrong, it isn't too late! I—"

"Obviously you haven't heard the news. It was on the radio just before I left. Guy, Brian Niesmith is dead."

He regarded her with a wide stare of disbelief.

"He killed himself, Guy. Last night, in his bedroom at home. A friend found him early this morning. He'd written a note confessing how he embezzled funds from the bank. No, Guy, sit down. You look a bit shaky.

"Relax—there's nothing to worry about. I admit I wasn't exactly sure how I'd handle it, but he made it easy when he told me about the loaded revolver he kept in his bedside stand. Such a lousy lover—and spineless to boot. He wrote precisely what I told him to write, spelled it all out except for what he'd done with the money."

The measured cadence of her voice, her tea-party smile, her white-gloved hands folded demurely in her lap made seeming nonsense of what she said. Guy whirled to face her.

"You're lying! If you think I'm not serious about—"

"Guy, don't *excite* yourself. Believe me, it's quite true. Don't you see? It was the only way. Just what you wanted, remember? To incriminate Brian. Think of it, all we have to do is pay a visit to the bank where you stashed the money. I suppose we'll be expected to attend the funeral. We can take the rest of that day off and do our—banking."

Guy turned his back to her and looked up at the cloudless blue sky. His shoulders began to shake.

Startled by his reaction, she said sharply: "Oh, for God's sake, Guy, don't waste your tears on Brian Niesmith."

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But then he faced her and she saw that he was trembling with suppressed laughter.

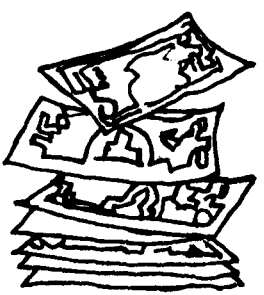
"Norma, I'm afraid there's one thing I neglected to tell you. When I rented that safe-deposit box, I was still hoping somehow to put the blame on Niesmith. I rented the box in his name. We can't touch it. By Tuesday the bank will have heard about Brian's death. They'll seal the box."

Stunned, her face went white. "You *fool!*"

"It appears we fooled each other," he replied. "Now we can only wait."

"*Wait?* Wait for what?"

"To see if either of us fooled the police. Frankly, I wouldn't bank on it. We'll have to sweat it out. It would look suspicious to run away. We're boxed in, I'm afraid. Like the three hundred thousand dollars."



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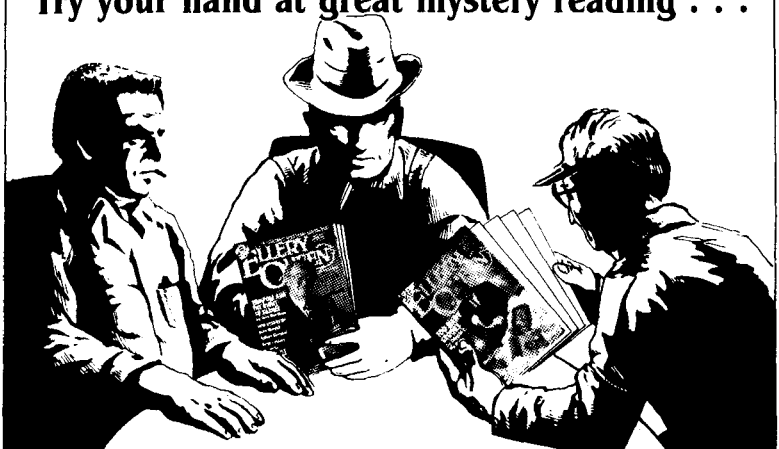

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a double header by

PHYLLIS DILLER

This duet of stories from one of America's most astounding talents arrived at our offices the same day in February 1991. Phyllis Diller is as adept at the short-short mystery as she is at one-liners. So take a very *deep breath and enjoy . . .*

THE MISFIT

by PHYLLIS DILLER

Always a dollar and a minute late, Frank Pello felt that the business world wasn't for him. Through a contact with Ernie, the bookmaker at the Allegheny Benevolent Club, one Monday morning at Vitello's Restaurant Frank found himself in the presence of Gus Deck.

The most important gangster in that part of Pennsylvania, Gus looked up from his plate of steaming lasagna, liked what he saw in the burly twenty-five-year-old man, and said, "Kid, you want to work for us, I hear."

"Yes, Mr. Deck. It would be an honor."

"I happen to have a little assignment for you. There's a gentleman in Scranton who has a big mouth. Could you do something about that? His name is Joe Styles."

"It would be an honor, Mr. Deck."

"Five hundred. We pay beginners five hundred."

Frank drove to Scranton in his tired Buick and signed in at a dinky hotel on Pittston Street. In his room, he checked out the gun that had been provided him by one of Gus Deck's associates and was satisfied that it would work smoothly and silently.

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Frank drove to the Styles home north of the city to check out the area. A crowd had gathered in front of the Tudor-style house. Beyond the tall iron gates, he could make out the flashing red color of an ambulance doppler light. He parked up the block and sauntered back to the crowd. Pleasantly, he asked a man in a bathrobe, obviously a neighbor, what had happened. The man in the bathrobe said, "Joe Styles just drowned in his pool. Heart attack probably."

Two weeks later, Frank again found himself in the presence of Gus Deck. Deck had another problem, this time in Paoli—this chore a little more urgent than the first. Frank rushed off to Paoli. After checking into an even-numbered third-floor room at the Paoli Lodge, he looked out the window and nodded. It was as he'd been told. He could see the back yard where Andrew Cooper spent much of his day enjoying his roses.

Frank assembled his powerful rifle and attached the high-powered telescopic lens. Looking through it right at the heart of the Cooper rose garden, he saw a group of people scurrying about as if in a panic. Puzzled, he sat down and turned on the television set to divert himself as he mulled over his plans.

A special bulletin came on just as Charlie Chan was ready to identify the culprit. In a somber voice, the announcer said, "Word has just come in that Andrew Cooper is dead. While working in his rose garden, he stepped on a live electrical wire that had been temporarily placed in a rose bed by a repairman."

Three weeks went by. Frank Pello found himself in Easton. His Uzi under his coat, he had only to walk into the kitchen of the China Seas Restaurant and decimate Larry Lee. Lee, it seemed, had been encroaching on one of Gus Deck's major enterprises, the ripping off of famous-name garments.

In the alley behind the restaurant, Gus again saw a crowd. In the melange of accents and sounds, he heard someone say clearly, "They'll never bring Larry Lee back to life. Those mushrooms he ate kill you forever."

Frank Pello went home and took a job as a siding salesman.

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FORE!

by PHYLLIS DILLER

Fate hadn't been kind to George Lambert. First, no inner voice had cautioned him about courting and marrying Eleanor. More important, fate had really interfered with his golf game. An avid golfer, he'd been forced to play on Tuesdays because the luck of the draw at the office had given the typical Wednesday off favored by physicians to his partner. That pained George more than all the unhappy years of his marriage.

Tuesday was the weekday at the club open to the wives of the members. Out of a malicious desire to aggravate their husbands rather than evince a love of the game, the ladies swarmed all over the club on Tuesdays. In the breakfast or dining room, their incessant chatter was annoying but tolerable. On the course, however, no tolerance was sufficient to excuse their behavior. To a woman, their game was devoid of form or sport. Most of them in their fifties, they played in all directions. A tee shot could go off at angles never before charted. Not infrequently on a tee shot, the ball landed behind the players. When men on the course at the same time heard a shrill feminine "Fore!" their stomachs churned in fear. The possibility of maiming was at hand.

Of the dufferettes, Eleanor Lambert was by far the worst. Her best tee shot could soar no farther than ten feet away. Once, some years before, she'd driven a ball twenty yards and it was cause for celebration. Even more certain than death and taxes was the fact that Eleanor's shots could go in any direction except straight ahead. Her best score ever was 165 for nine holes. She'd never played eighteen because dusk always descended during the sixth or seventh hole.

Unless he was out on the course, George Lambert hid in the steam room when his wife was playing. The silent ridicule of his peers and the pity in their eyes haunted him.

The day he learned that Eleanor would be in the foursome directly behind his, George was ready to cancel. He claimed that his left arm hurt at the elbow, he had a bad cold, and he was suffering from an attack of the malaria inflicted on him in some foreign war he'd

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merely read about. Those excuses falling lamely on the locker-room floor, he tried religion and a quote or two about the end of the world from Nostradamus. All Ben Bennett said was, "We're playing."

"I really don't feel well, Ben."

"You *look* great."

Joe Lane, another of the foursome, said, "You're a coward, Georgie. When my wife plays, I face the world proudly. Who else is married to someone who owns a record 25 on a par 3 hole?"

"I honestly think I have a fever," George said.

"*One time* we're foursome to foursome," Ben pointed out. "It's never happened before and it won't happen again. Or we'll kill the starter."

"What's the big deal, anyway?" Andy Corona, the fourth member, said. "By the second hole they'll be arguing about whose turn it is. A dozen foursomes will play through them and we'll be miles ahead."

"Why couldn't she have taken up tennis?" George said. He sighed and wondered aloud if Eleanor had asked for that tee-off time to hurt him.

Although Eleanor and her friends were already waiting off to the side, the men managed to get off fairly decent shots, all of them straight down the fairway. George's ball landed dead center, almost on the invisible line between the giant sycamores on each side of the fairway—one hundred and fifty yards. George was pleased with himself as he got into the cart he was sharing with Ben. The men moved off.

The women waited, then moved forward to their tee spot, some yards shorter than the other. Impatiently, as she walked forward, Eleanor said, "I took a lesson last Tuesday."

"If you drive twenty yards," Ann Bennett said, "I'll buy you that snakeskin purse you want at Ogilvy's."

Eleanor took some practice swings and prepared to drive. In deference to her prowess, the other women backed up. Marsha Lane found a hiding place behind the plastic windshield of the golf cart.

From her defensive position behind the nearest thick copse, Frances Corona said, "Maybe we ought to wait till the men clear the fairway. They get so annoyed when we close in. One of us could hit somebody."

"There's no chance we'll come close," Ann Bennett said. "I'm a good player and I couldn't reach them."

Marsha Lane said, "They're just standing around."

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Down the fairway, George studied his lie. He'd hit a beauty. But the sand trap ahead loomed ominously as he turned to plan an approach to the hole.

Joe had been looking back toward the women and he laughed. "The girls look like they're going to drive," he said.

Andy groaned. "Why don't they wait until we're out of here?"

"They couldn't reach us with a cannon," Ben said from his seat in the golf cart.

"Why don't you all get lost so I can get ready to swing?" George said. He looked down at his five-iron, trying to psyche it into the proper swing. He allowed his muscle memory to flow.

After her "Fore!" Eleanor's swing was liquid and true. The golfball shot forward. Never rising much above the horizon, it zoomed through the air silently.

"My God," Ann Bennett said, "you actually hit the ball!"

"You never drove so far," Fran said. "Nobody has!"

"I think you hit one of the men," said Marsha Lane.

"What are you talking about?" Ann looked and gasped. "Oh, no. Oh, no! That's George on the grass. I can tell. The others are wearing light sweaters. He loves that ugly maroon."

"Stop needling me," Eleanor said.

"It's true," Ann insisted. "The ball hit George!"

At the Bronson Driving Range, Armando, the assistant, oiled the scooping jaws of the small red tractor they used to gather the spent balls early in the morning. Nearby, leaning against the back wall of the shack that housed the office and ball booth, Joe Bronson read the morning paper as he waited for a trayful of balls to soak clean. Looking up from an item in the paper, he called to Armando. "Listen to this beauty."

"I can't hear!" Armando called back.

Joe raised his voice. "There's a thing in the paper—some guy was killed on the golf course! His wife got him with a drive right smack in the head!"

"Sign her up for the tour! See, Joe, that's why I stick to soccer—you can have an accident in golf!"

"How do you know it was an accident? She could have gotten him deliberately."

"With a drive? I'll give you eight to one *you* couldn't do it!"

"I suppose not. But, let me tell you, there's a lady been coming in almost every day for fifteen years—about noon, when you're on your

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lunch break. She can hit that one-fifty-yard marker twenty out of twenty! When she first come in, she was a real cripple—now, twenty out of twenty. And she gets right in the middle of the zero every time."

"Is that what punched the hole in that marker?"

"One time I saw her hit thirty out of thirty!"

Mr. Tuttle, the insurance man, was properly reverential. His thin face pinched—his way of showing concern for the tribulations being faced by the widow—he put the papers for signature down gently. "You'll notice that the amount is twice the face value of the policy. Accident, you know."

Eleanor Lambert started to sign automatically, as if her mind, heart, and soul were planets away.

"There's no doubt it was an accident," Mr. Tuttle said. Sighing, he concluded, "Four million dollars can't bring him back, but it's still something."

Ten minutes later, the check in her hand and the annoying insurance man gone, Eleanor started to plan the rest of her life. Travel, of course, and much shopping. She'd buy out Paris and Rome. If George looked down from heaven, or up from the alternative, she'd flaunt the price tags. He used to turn pale at any dress that cost more than ten dollars.

What a wonderful world it would be! No more golf. How she hated that stupid, idiotic, moronic game. Best of all, no more rushing out to that dirty golf range every morning as soon as George went off to work.

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Roy Vickers, the ninth winner of the thirteen-year Ellery Queen contest, was the creator of the Department of Dead Ends, called by Ellery Queen "the pertinacious, elephant-memoried bureau of Scotland Yard, and the most brilliant practitioner of the 'inverted detective story' of our generation. 'Double Image' is not a tale of the Department of Dead Ends, but it is blood-brother, almost the identical twin, of that great series."

Besides his detective novels and short stories, Roy Vickers (1889–1965) was a longtime journalist, court reporter, and editor of Novel Magazine. The mind boggles not only at his skill as a detective-story writer but at the fascinating scope of his working life . . .

DOUBLE IMAGE

by ROY VICKERS

There are some truths which the public invariably labels fictional. For instance, the Fanshaw murder mystery pivoted on the murderer being so like Julian Fanshaw that the latter's wife, Elsa, could fail to notice the difference. The public, bypassing the evidence, said that no wife could make that mistake and wondered why the police believed such a childish tale. The police, of course, do not commonly accept a tall tale in lieu of an alibi.

Seen from the outside, the Fanshaws were an ordinary young couple who lived in the well appointed suburb of Rubington. They had a pleasant eight-room house, with more than half an acre of garden. A strange talent for getting and keeping competent help insured a smooth domesticity.

In the first week in October, Elsa announced at breakfast that she was going to town for a day's shopping.

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Her husband said he would squeeze in the time to have lunch with her at Blainley's Restaurant at one o'clock. On the train she fell in with a neighbor, Gwenda Blagrove, and eventually brought her along to Blainley's, believing that her husband would be pleased, as Gwenda's husband had been of use to Fanshaw in the city.

The Fanshaws' marriage had been satisfactory, so far. Elsa was sufficiently good-looking to seem beautiful to any man who liked her mental and emotional makeup. She kept her moods to herself. So did her husband. True, they had settled into a jog trot of absent-minded affection. He had ceased to notice her dress and she had taught herself to laugh at the right time without actually listening to his stories. For five years they had rippled along, stretching their income but avoiding really dangerous debt. A substantial sum which would revert to Julian on the death of an uncle discouraged saving.

The two women turned up at the restaurant ahead of time. At eleven minutes to one, they were waiting in the entrance hall, which was somewhat crowded. At nine minutes to one, Elsa exclaimed, "There's Julian! He hasn't seen us, but he's coming this way."

Julian Fanshaw was easy to pick out of a crowd, so Elsa always saw him before he saw her. He was taller than most men and he had the well developed chest and overdeveloped shoulder muscles that come from rowing for one's university. His face was large, lean, and amiable, with a dimple in his chin. He went to a good tailor and his lounge suits were always of the same steely grey—the precise shade of which, Elsa said, she had never seen on any other man. His lightweight overcoats were cut from the same material. There was a touch of individuality even in his broad-brimmed homburg.

"He has seen you, but not me," corrected Gwenda—a trivial remark which later acquired a certain importance. "We'd better stand still or we'll be dodging each other."

The tall man with the steely grey clothes and the dimpled chin was weaving toward them.

"Julian! I've persuaded Gwenda to join us for lunch! We were both—"

The man she addressed did not ignore her. He seemed to assume that she was speaking across him to someone else. He looked into her eyes, doffed his hat, gave her a stranger's smile, murmured, "Sorry!" and moved toward the cloakroom, leaving Elsa to gape at the overdeveloped shoulder muscles under the grey overcoat. The overcoat seemed to be not quite the same, but she couldn't be sure.

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Gwenda was muttering to herself. Elsa looked frightened.

"You thought it was Julian, too," Elsa almost whispered. "You were just going to speak to him."

"It *was* Julian! You can't mistake another man for your own husband!"

"But I did! Though when he turned his back I did think the overcoat was of a different material, even if it was practically the same shade."

"His overcoat! Has Julian a twin brother?"

"No. He is a twin, but the other died when they were babies. It must be his double."

"Nobody can be as double as that!"

Yet there it was. Elsa felt as many have felt immediately after an accident—that she must force herself backward in time to the moment before it happened. Gwenda was still explaining about doubles when—at six minutes to one—Elsa felt a hand on her arm.

Julian again? Or just Julian?

"Julian! I've persuaded Gwenda to join us for lunch." She was saying it again. "We were both going to the same shops—"

"Splendid! Sorry you've been waiting but I'm still five minutes to the good. I'll just dump my coat."

After a civil exchange with Gwenda, he hurried off before they could tell him about the other Julian.

Elsa brought it up at lunch. In spite of Gwenda's corroboration, it sounded like a small-talk exaggeration.

Julian mumbled politely about it.

"But, don't you see, it's terrific!" cried Gwenda. "Elsa was as sure as I was that it was you! She says you actually are a twin."

"Yes, that does give a tang to it," grinned Julian. "Unfortunately, my twin lived for only two days, statutory—my father told me it was twenty-six hours."

"Were you born at home?"

"We were born at St. Seiriol's."

"Where hundreds are born every day."

"Not hundreds every day—tens, perhaps. I can guess what you're thinking. But a mix-up of babies is such a likely thing to happen that it would be happening almost daily if they didn't have a foolproof system for tabbing them. Nothing there!"

At home that evening Elsa's chatter lost its bubble.

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"What's on your mind, darling? You were shopping today. If someone has stopped your credit, we can probably fix it up."

"It's that double of yours. You didn't really listen when Gwenda and I told you about him. He almost brushed against me. Our eyes met and I *still* thought he was you. He said 'Sorry' in the same muttering tone you use. And he was dressed in exactly your grey, with the same cut, though the material itself may have been different. It's as if he must have been your identical twin."

Julian frowned. "Apart from anything else, we have no evidence that my twin brother was an identical. So, darling, you won't start something on that, will you? I mean the one about the nurses having changed the babies and one day the true earl turns up to claim the titles and estate. At the moment, we have neither title nor estate for a missing heir to claim. Anyway, I'm the older brother."

"You're laughing at me."

"Just a little. I don't believe your yarn. Only there's nothing we can do about it except keep on agreeing that it's most extraordinary. So let's forget it."

On the evening of the following day, Julian, who was very regular in his habits, failed to appear at the usual time. Within an hour, Elsa was waiting on the porch.

"Julian! Has something awful happened?"

"My dear girl, I'm barely an hour late! Just missed the train, that's all. I had a slack afternoon, so I thought I'd pop around the corner for a heart-to-heart talk with Uncle Ernest. The awful thing—if any—is that he's in rude health. We'll be middle-aged before we benefit."

Later in the evening, he expanded. "Things have been rather tight the last six months. Some of my best clients are asking for longer credit, and they ought to have it. Obviously, the sensible thing is for me to realize at least part of my interest under the reversion. I can't do it without Uncle Ernest's consent. So I offered to pay him five hundred if he would authorize me to borrow ten thousand. It's pure gain for him—he loses nothing and risks nothing."

"How did he take it?"

"He was very sour. Gave me a pijaw about living too extravagantly. I told him we didn't—because we don't!"

"I could manage with only Mrs. Benson. And we could do nearly all the gardening ourselves."

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"We could not. And it isn't necessary. There's no crisis. It's simply that I'm pegged down for lack of a spot of extra capital."

Which was only a different way of putting it, thought Elsa.

"Julian, never mind how silly I am, please answer! If that man really is your twin—in spite of all the reasons why he can't be—would he share in the money on your uncle's death?"

"If I had a brother, which I have not, we would split." Julian was scornful. "On the utterly fantastic premise that my brother is alive, why doesn't he show up and make a fuss about it? Why lurk about and dress like me and play bogeyman at you?"

They talked no more about the double until the following evening, when Mrs. Hebbleton rang Elsa.

To the extent that Rubington possessed a social leader, Mrs. Hebbleton filled the role. Of moderate intelligence and immoderate energy, she became president or secretary of most local activities and enjoyed every minute of it.

"Mrs. Hebbleton says she buttonholed you near the railway station yesterday evening."

"She did not!"

"That you had come off the six-oh-five as usual and that you accepted for us to dine there next Thursday. And that she handed you the nominal roll of the tennis club to give to me and I'd promised to do some of the letters."

Julian was obliged to admit that this must be the handiwork of the double.

"That chap," said Julian, "is playing a game of his own. Turning up at Blainley's when you were there and doing this stunt in Rubington where we live—both can no longer be chance. Why didn't he tell Mrs. Hebbleton his name isn't Fanshaw?"

"But supposing it is?"

"Don't bring that up again, darling. Whatever his name is, we're going to look silly."

Next day, over morning coffee, Mrs. Hebbleton came to the point.

"Gwenda told me an extraordinary story about your mistaking another man for your husband, though what use our nominal roll can be to him if he's *not* your husband—"

"Gwenda mistook him, too," put in Elsa.

"In a crowded restaurant, perhaps," conceded Mrs. Hebbleton. "But I'm sure you'll understand that I must ask you to prepare another nominal roll."

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"I will, with pleasure," she said. "But Gwenda was as close to him as I was."

"It's all very peculiar indeed, but I shall expect you both on Thursday all the same," said Mrs. Hebbleton magnanimously. "If there really is a double impersonating your husband, I imagine you will take steps."

"I don't see what we can do."

"Do you think it's ever true that one can do nothing?" said Mrs. Hebbleton. "Why not apply to the police for protection? Superintendent Norris is a very capable man. If you care to mention my name, I'm sure he'll do something for you."

Thus goaded, Elsa unfolded her tale to the superintendent, who disconcerted her by making notes.

"Let's take the restaurant incident first, Mrs. Fanshaw. Between the two appearances, you tell me, there was an interval of three minutes. In that time Mr. Fanshaw could—I don't say he did, mind—I say he *could* have gone out by a side door and come in again by the main door. To play a practical joke on you ladies. And he might have been continuing the joke with Mrs. Hebbleton. By the way, I suppose Mr. Fanshaw hasn't a twin brother?"

"He did have"—and Elsa told the tale about the short-lived baby.

"Then that's out of it," said the superintendent, nevertheless making a note of it.

"Mrs. Hebbleton," said Elsa to her husband that night, "thinks she runs Rubington because she's rumored to be a cousin of the Duke of Sheffield. Before marriage, her name was Jennifer Maud Carmaenham. I wish you'd look her up in *Who's Who*—there's sure to be a copy at your club."

"Aren't you being catty, darling?"

"Yes, and I'm liking it. She as good as said that there's no double—that it's only you playing the fool. And she practically forced me to go to the local police." She added an account of her interview with the superintendent.

Julian's reaction was disappointing. In silence, he took a postcard from his pocket, on which he made calculations of time.

"The superintendent is on solid ground," he pronounced. "The attitude of that woman is asinine, of course, but we can't defend ourselves. I can't prove I was somewhere else at the relevant times." He added gloomily, "This might damage us quite a lot. If that chap crops up again, I'll consider asking legal advice . . ."

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The next incident touched on the business relations of the Fanshaws, uncle and nephew.

Julian was a slow-transport agent. If you wished to move a wardrobe or a ton of fertilizer or whatnot to the next town, or to an obscure island in the Pacific, without incurring the cost of express delivery, Julian Fanshaw was your man. He had maps and technical charts showing the most inexpensive way of sending goods from almost any spot on earth to almost any other.

Ernest Fanshaw, who was a fuel agent specializing in the less common fuels, occasionally employed the services of his nephew. As their offices were within a minute's walk, they were in the habit of calling on each other and doing their business personally to preserve the family courtesies.

John Thwaites, Ernest Fanshaw's elderly head clerk, who had many of the qualities of a family retainer, was shocked when Julian presented himself at three in the afternoon and asked if his uncle was disengaged.

Mr. Thwaites looked surprised.

"But, Mr. Julian! He's very busy just now, and he wasn't really pleased when you dropped in this morning to see him."

"But I did *not* drop in this morning!"

The clerk, after careful scrutiny, could find no sign of excessive drinking.

"Mr. Julian, I myself showed you in."

"Mr. Thwaites, this is damned serious!"

Julian strode into the private office and opened the door. Ernest Fanshaw, who had been dozing in his chair, opened his eyes and blinked.

"Sorry, Uncle. Thwaites says he showed me into this room this morning. I was not here this morning. I have been impersonated. I'll tell you all about it—"

After some confusion, they reached bedrock.

"Let us be precise," said Ernest Fanshaw. "On Tuesday afternoon, you called here to make an improper offer about the reversion. This morning, sitting where you're sitting now, you tried a new approach to the same subject. Before you left this room, I produced your account for the sum of forty-three pounds, twelve shillings, apologizing for having neglected to settle it before, and gave you a check for that amount. Are you telling me you have forgotten? Feel in your pocket."

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"Uncle Ernest! If it was a check made out to cash, you've probably lost your money. If it was a check made out to me, phone the bank now and have it stopped."

When the bank had been warned, Julian told his tale, to which his uncle listened with impatience.

"I've never heard anything so damned ridiculous! This double—as you call him—how the devil could he know anything about that reversion?"

"I haven't the ghost of a notion, but I do know that he has nosed out a lot of details of my business and domestic affairs. He has made a fool of me in Rubington, impersonating me to our friends."

It was his nephew's tone that impressed Ernest and inclined him to take notice.

"Julian, it has suddenly struck me—d'you think it possible that something slipped in the hospital and that your twin brother—"

"I've given up guessing. After this, I shall see my lawyer and hit back if I can."

Julian told Elsa about it—then slipped in the unwelcome information that *Who's Who* fully authenticated Mrs. Hebbleton's claim to be the cousin of a duke.

"Anyhow, she'll have to believe now that there's a double, duke or no duke."

A couple of days later, Miss Hackett, Julian's secretary, came into his room looking slightly offended. He had first met Miss Hackett when he was a small boy on a visit to the office. On his father's sudden death, while Julian was at Cambridge, she had proved herself a very competent manager. She was content to continue as Julian's secretary and office aunt.

"Mr. Thwaites has been on the phone with a very mysterious message," she said with disapproval. "Your uncle asks you to meet him at his bank in ten minutes. It's very urgent. And there is no explanation."

In the bank manager's room Julian was shown the check for £43 12/, which had been cashed through a post-office savings account.

"The endorsement certainly looks like my signature. But I know I did not endorse that check, and anyway I have no post-office account, so I declare the endorsement a forgery."

The bank manager, applying a routine test, agreed that the signature had been traced and insisted on calling the police. Julian, eager to cooperate, volunteered to go with the police to the branch post

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office, warning them that he would be identified as the forger. They were so alike, he told them, that his own wife had made a mistake.

Pursuing the twin-brother theory, the police visited St. Seiriol's Hospital, Westminster, where Julian had been born. The records showed that there had been five male babies born within an hour of the twins and a total of eleven males and seven females—with one male death—within twenty-six hours. But the routine for preventing a confusion of babies was so thorough that the possibility of a mistake was untenable.

There remained the thin chance that a nurse might have tampered with the routine, robbing the mother of twins in pity for the bereaved mother of a singleton. So the police worked on the list of nurses and patients of twenty-nine years ago. Five of the nurses had died, and more than half the number of parents were untraceable.

They interviewed Elsa and were impressed. Gwenda Blagrove's testimony added nothing. Mrs. Hebbleton challenged them to explain why the double should want the nominal roll of the tennis club. The local superintendent agreed that it was incredible that Mr. Fanshaw should play such a clownish trick on his uncle and promised to keep a sharp lookout in Rubington.

After a blank week, the papers of the case came before Chief Inspector Thurtle, who sent a courteous request to Julian to call at Scotland Yard.

Thurtle had the appearance of a prosperous family man who is bullied by his daughters. Many of his earlier successes were due to his talent for inspiring confidence.

"Our chief difficulty is that all roads lead back to you, Mr. Fanshaw—such as that post-office clerk identifying you yourself as the double. I thought pr'aps you'd like to let us have your fingerprints—for your own sake."

Julian thanked him and had his prints taken.

"Forty-three quid odd," resumed Thurtle, "seems a very poor target for an elaborate stunt like this. He dresses himself up like you, and that alone would cost more than thirty. And why does he force himself on your wife's attention at a restaurant? And why the practical joke on Mrs. Hebbleton? Of course, we have to deal with the fact of forgery. But, between you and me, it looks more like a hoax. That suggests he may be your twin brother nursing a grievance, in spite of what the hospital people say."

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Julian was unresponsive. "If he's my brother, why doesn't he show up in a friendly way? He'd have a strong moral claim on us."

"Would he be entitled to any money?"

"There's no immediate money. But there's a reversion on my uncle's death—about fifty thousand pounds—which he would share equally with me."

Thurtle said this was important and took a note of details.

"We have to find a means of separating your movements from his, Mr. Fanshaw. Now, he was getting that check out of your uncle at about twenty past twelve on the morning of the fourteenth. You were in your office at that time, I suppose?"

"Probably—just a minute." Julian produced a pocket diary. "The fourteenth. I have an entry—*Who's Who.*" He smiled. "My wife had asked me to look up a social reference. So I went to my club, leaving the office at twelve. I walked, so I must have got there—the Junior Commonwealth, Mendover Street—about ten past."

"Can you give me something to check on, just for the record?" Then Thurtle added, "That's a large club and I don't suppose the staff ticks off every member—there'd be a good many coming in at that time. You had lunch with somebody?"

"N-no, I had a standup in the snack bar. I don't remember running into any of my own clique there. On the way to the reading room I nodded to one or two acquaintances. I doubt if they'll remember."

They did not remember. Thurtle's checkup at the club yielded no one, of membership or staff, who could state positively that Julian Fanshaw was or was not there on the fourteenth.

Thurtle followed up with inquiries in Rubington, intensive but fruitless. He called on Ernest Fanshaw and enlisted the latter's cooperation. Then he sent Fanshaw another equally courteous request to call at the Yard.

When Julian had seated himself and accepted a cigarette, Thurtle reported his total lack of progress in any direction—then waited for Julian to say something.

"Awkward for me." Julian braced himself. "Let's face it, Inspector. Like Mrs. Hebbleton, you suspect that I have played my own double as a practical joke?"

"Not as a practical joke."

Julian looked puzzled.

Thurtle went on: "Take the buildup of this double of yours—or identical twin, if you like. He must have staged the incident at

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Blainley's Restaurant—same applies to Mrs. Hebbleton and her tennis papers—and to that prank with the forty-three-quid check. Builds up a half lunatic who might do anything." Thurtle paused. "For instance, he might murder your uncle—and leave you to collect the fifty thousand quid."

Julian removed his cigarette and stared at it. "Let's take this slowly, Inspector. You don't believe this fellow exists. You suggest that 'he' might murder my uncle—meaning that *I* might murder my uncle."

"Put it this way, Mr. Fanshaw. I'm warning you that if you have any such fantasy in your brain, you'd do well to get rid of it."

Julian laughed loudly and long.

"It's a great idea, Inspector! I scupper Uncle Ernest and plant the murder on a ghost!"

"Just so. Our job is to prevent crime when we can."

"You do it very thoroughly," sighed Julian. "If I had had any such plan—fantasy, you rightly called it—you would have dished it." He got up and moved toward the door. "The police have done a lot of work on this job—which you believe to be a hoax on my part. Am I to be charged with 'creating a public mischief'—if that's what it's called?"

"We have no immediate intention of making that charge, Mr. Fanshaw."

"Haven't you?" Julian smiled. *"I wonder why!"*

There were no developments during the next fortnight. Elsa no longer asked every evening if there was news of the double. Routine was restored. Fifteen days after the incident of the forged check, Julian announced that he intended to go to Manchester the following afternoon—a Tuesday—in hope of nailing an important new client, and that he would stay overnight, returning home at the usual time on Wednesday evening.

In the middle of Tuesday afternoon, Elsa heard a latchkey and ran into the hall.

"Julian! I thought you were going to Manchester today!"

"Washout. Phonecall just as I was leaving the office. I'd made arrangements with Miss Hackett, so I thought I'd knock off work just the same."

"What've you done with your suitcase, Julian?" Her voice was the least bit unsteady.

"Damn! Left it at the office."

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Mrs. Benson was making a clatter in the kitchen. Even so, she would hear a scream. Elsa saw that he had guessed her thought. He looked angry, but she did not flinch.

"How do I know you *are* Julian?"

"You don't, I guess. And you never will know, because there's no means of telling you. 'I am myself'—what the devil does it mean? Nothing!" His anger seemed to be lost in self-pity. "I am not just like one man but thousands. My conversation is the same as theirs, my habits, my very gestures. And we all whisper the same things to our wives. Why is it remarkable that some of us should have the same face?" He laughed as a man who laughs at himself. "But if it's the problem of my face that's worrying you, perhaps you noticed at breakfast this morning that I had nicked myself while shaving. Look closely—left side, near the ear—and if you can find a trace of the nick, treasure it. It's my solitary claim to individuality."

"Don't work yourself up over nothing, Julian." Elsa felt ashamed of herself. "After all, I was wrong about you once."

"Sorry, darling. It was your question that upset me. I thought you meant it seriously. Perhaps you did—don't tell me! The truth is, this wretched double business is getting us down. Let's snap out of it for a few hours. I vote we have a nice noisy evening in town. Elsa—*Elsa!*" His voice pushed aside the five years of jogtrot, leaving her dizzy.

They used the car, to eliminate the rush for the last train. Neighbors, the Brigstocks, saw them dining at Blainley's and thought that they seemed absorbed in each other—which was true.

They went to a musical show and afterward to a nightclub. He noticed her dress. She listened to his stories and laughed because she was amused. She set herself to engage his whole attention. When they had returned to Rubington, she was still effervescent. They were acutely conscious of each other.

Next morning he was the first up and about. By the time Elsa came downstairs, Mrs. Benson had brought in breakfast and placed his overcoat and hat in readiness for him in the hall—the staff was always devoted to Julian. A thin beam of sunlight, filtering through the glass panel in the front door, rested on the overcoat.

Elsa looked at the coat—then passed on as if she had not seen it. On the hall table, as usual, was a copy of the *Times*. She opened a drawer, took out an ancient pair of scissors with which she would often cut out the crossword puzzle before Julian whisked it off to the

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office—and the next instant turned back to the coat. It was the right shade, but the material, she thought, was different—the same difference she had noted in the coat of the "double" that day at Blainley's Restaurant.

How utterly ridiculous! It's the effect of the sun on it! The thought was unspoken, but she laughed aloud—and laughed a second time as she stopped herself from fingering the material. She positively bounced into breakfast.

She began to chatter. She made a casual remark about one of their friends. His mumbled answer confused her by its irrelevance. Her thoughts flew back to the coat in the hall. In the next few seconds, she felt the blood rushing in her head. She steadied herself and pushed back her chair. The same words came unbidden.

"How do I know you *are* Julian?"

Their eyes met, fanning her panic.

"You can say that to me, Elsa, after all that has passed between us since yesterday afternoon?"

"You're stalling!" It was almost a whisper. "If you're Julian, tell me the name of my bridesmaid—the pet name we've always used."

"A test question!" He laughed. "After five years and two months of marriage you need a password to tell you the difference between your husband and another man of the same appearance. It proves what I was saying yesterday—"

"Why don't you answer?"

"For one of two reasons. Either I am not your husband and don't know the answer. Or I am your husband and see no point in answering. Think it over, Elsa, and you'll find that it doesn't matter a damn to you whether I'm Julian Fanshaw or his twin brother."

He got up and walked out.

Elsa sagged in her chair. Had she insulted both Julian and herself? It was one thing to mistake the other man for Julian for a few seconds in Blainley's Restaurant. But last night! As if she could have the slightest doubt! Why, the thing was a psychological absurdity! She didn't move until Mrs. Benson came in to clear the breakfast table.

Toward the end of the morning it dawned on her that she could remove all doubt by ringing his office. But she must choose her words carefully. Secretaries were very cautious of what they said to wives about husbands.

She looked up the train schedule to Manchester. There was a dining-car express arriving in London at 2:45. Julian would take that train—*if* he were in Manchester.

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"Oh, Miss Hackett!" she was saying at a few minutes past two. "Is Julian back yet?"—a question which might have referred to lunch.

"No, Mrs. Fanshaw. He said he'd probably take the midday express from Manchester, so he should be here about three. Shall I ask him to ring you?"

"No, thanks. It's of no importance, and I'll be out at three."

So much for the psychological absurdity. All emotion had spent itself and she faced with detachment the riddle of what to say to Julian.

Actually, she said nothing. Julian came home at the usual time. Watching him from the window, she thought he looked haggard. When she met him in the hall, he burst into a heartiness that was wholly unconvincing.

"Hullo, darling! Had a good day? I came down with Brigstock. Says he saw us at Blainley's last night—they were three tables away, apparently—couldn't catch our eye—eyes, I mean. I told him you and I were having an evening out together for a change. Not a bad evening either, eh? Shan't be long."

He hurried upstairs, carrying his suitcase. She had said nothing, and he had not noticed her silence.

He had picked up the truth from Brigstock, she concluded, and wished to spare her feelings. But perhaps that was not quite his style—in their five years, all his little kindnesses had been trumpeted. More probably he found the facts humiliating to himself and wished to avoid discussion. She would play along.

On the last Monday in November, six weeks after the incident of the forged check, Ernest Fanshaw's head clerk overheard what he took to be the voice of Julian Fanshaw speaking to the reception girl. Through the window he noted the steely-grey overcoat and the wide-brimmed homburg affected by Julian Fanshaw, and under his arm a folded newspaper, obviously the *Times*. The clocks were striking eleven.

"Good morning, Mr. Thwaites. Do you think Uncle Ernest could spare me five minutes, or are you working him too hard?"

"Ah! Your uncle doesn't need anybody to make him work." He spoke on the office telephone. "Mr. Julian is here, sir. Very good, sir. Will you go right through, Mr. Julian?"

Ernest Fanshaw had been compelled by the logic of events to accept the idea of "the double"—which was repugnant to him. But as his inner door opened, he forgot the double and saw only his

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nephew. He also forgot the arrangement made with Inspector Thurtle—which Thwaites was at the moment putting into action.

"Well, Julian. I hope you haven't come to talk about that reversion again?"

"Not literally, Uncle. The reversion can remain in the background of our thoughts." Julian spoke with one eye on the inner door, as if he expected interruption. "I want you to make me a personal loan of a thousand pounds."

The proposition was not fully expanded before the head clerk came in without knocking. He handed his employer a folded slip.

Ernest Fanshaw studied the slip with undisguised astonishment. He stared at his caller. Then he stared at his clerk.

"All right, Thwaites. Go ahead."

Before the clerk had shut the door, the slip, which had been refolded, was snatched from Ernest Fanshaw's fingers.

"What have we here, Uncle?" Julian read the message aloud: " 'By phone as directed: Miss Hackett states that Mr. Julian Fanshaw is in his office at this moment. J. Thwaites.' I guessed it—your face gave you away. So Thwaites is ringing the police, eh?"

"What happens to you will depend largely on the evidence I give about that check. You're Julian's twin, aren't you?"

"So I believe. Taking myself at my face value and adding a few dates and places." He began to open out the copy of the *Times* he had brought with him. "There's an article here—"

"Sit down, sir! No doubt you believe yourself to have been ill-used. You may have been, but not by our family. In the circumstances I am prepared to—"

The extent of Ernest Fanshaw's intended benevolence was never known, because, at that moment, he died in mid-sentence without even an audible groan. He was killed with an Army dagger, by the commando technique employed when it is necessary that an enemy sentry shall die before he can make any sound whatever.

The murderer had been wearing cuffed cleaning gloves and had used the open copy of the *Times* to try to protect his clothes. But the cuff of the right-hand glove became bloodstained nevertheless. He shook the glove into the wastepaper basket. Then, with a quick intake of breath, he noticed a bloodstain on his overcoat, too—close to the second button.

The stain was slight, but recognizable, and had obviously been made by contact with the cuff. He glanced round the room, picked up a copy of a magazine, leaving the *Times* on Ernest Fanshaw's

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desk. With his gloved left hand, he then unlocked the door that gave onto the outside corridor. He shut and locked the door behind him. He folded the key in the left-hand glove and put it in a side pocket of his overcoat. The magazine, carried in a sufficiently natural manner, concealed the bloodstain near the second button.

It was now eight minutes past eleven.

Like any other murderer, he had to escape from the scene of the crime before the police arrived. He achieved this purpose when he entered the taxi that was waiting for him.

"Back to where you picked me up—you remember, just round the corner."

But like no other murderer, he wished to draw attention to his movements—for the next few minutes only. The taxi itself would be useful. No ordinary businessman would take a taxi for so short a distance, and keep it waiting to boot.

The taximan stopped outside the building containing Julian Fanshaw's office where he had originally picked up his passenger. The meter registered two shillings. The taximan was handed a ten-shilling note.

"Keep the change."

The taximan would remember. But some taximen were very clever at keeping out of the witness box. Luck produced a squad of window cleaners about to enter the building.

"Are you the foreman? My name is Fanshaw—you'll see it on the doors upstairs. I want you to do my windows last."

The foreman was given a pound note. Twenty shillings, where five would have been adequate. The foreman would remember.

And there was more luck coming. On the staircase he met a man coming down. The latter happened to be Marberry, whose office was on the third floor, a personal acquaintance of Julian Fanshaw's.

"Hullo, Fanshaw! Looks as if you were right about Pretty Polly!"

"Hope so. I'm backing her to win."

Marberry blinked as the other passed on. "Pretty Polly" was not a racehorse, but their own nickname for Pritt-Polson, owner of the building, whom they had been pressing for improvements.

Now the luck was petering out. In the hall below, there was a mild commotion. The window cleaner's voice and then Marberry's, explaining—obviously to the police. He caught the words "Pretty Polly." The taxi driver was chipping in, too.

He had not expected the police here for at least another twenty minutes. He would have to hurry . . .

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The fatal slip, of tradition, is often the result of an unconscious habit, a foible, an affectation which leads to identification and eventually to the gallows. The same principle operates, of course, in reverse—sometimes shielding the guilty, sometimes saving the innocent from arrest.

Julian might well have had no substantial alibi but for an odd little trick of carrying in his pockets unstamped postcards, on which he would make notes—both business and personal.

On the day of the murder, he had arrived at his office half an hour earlier than usual. A client, who had bought a furniture business in bankruptcy, required two thousand items of furniture to be transported from Plymouth to London within seven months and was clamoring for an estimate on slow delivery.

"This Baverbridge estimate will keep us on the hop," Julian said when he and Miss Hackett had hurried through the morning mail. "I made some notes at home last night—and some more in the train, with some queries for you." He flicked out half a dozen postcards, held them fanwise like a poker hand, then put them back in his pocket. "Now where the devil did I put those notes—?"

"In your overcoat pocket, I expect. Shall I look?"

"Please."

Julian's room was of the seedy type often affected by prosperous businessmen to convey that overhead costs are cut to a minimum for the benefit of the customer. The steely-grey overcoat and wide-brimmed homburg hung inelegantly on the wall between an early-model rolltop desk and a gaunt metal closet some six feet high, deemed to be fireproof. The walls were quite clean, but the carpet was nearly threadbare and one of the floorboards creaked.

Miss Hackett felt in the breast pocket of the overcoat and produced another poker hand of postcards.

"That's it. You might pencil in the answers, in case I get an idea when I'm not in the office. I'll be in the chart room if anything really urgent crops up."

The chart room was the powerhouse of the firm. It was lined with wall maps, several of which Julian now removed to the long table. There were special filing cabinets for the charts, a couple of fireproof cupboards, and a single chair. Considered as a room, it was the best in the suite, with an inner and outer door, whereas Julian's room was a mere annex of Miss Hackett's, with no outer door.

Thus Julian went through Miss Hackett's room, across the interior corridor containing a peephole window labeled *Inquiries,*

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through the typists' room to the chart room. He always went that way to the chart room and always made the return journey through the outer door of the chart room and the outer corridor, thereby completing a loop when he reached the interior corridor—another little idiosyncrasy which Miss Hackett had noted with auntlike indulgence.

In half an hour—that is, by eleven o'clock—Miss Hackett had looked up the references and filled in the blanks and queries on the overcoat postcards. She took the cards into Julian's room and put them on his desk. Then, reminding herself that he would probably drop something on top of them and leave the office without them, she picked up the cards again and put them back in the breast pocket of his overcoat. The telephone rang as she returned to her own room.

"Good morning, Miss Hackett, Mr. Thwaites speaking for Mr. Ernest Fanshaw. Is Mr. Julian in the office, please?"

"Yes, Mr. Thwaites. He's in the chart room. I can't switch you through, as there's no extension. If you'll wait a minute—"

"Don't disturb him, please. My chief only wishes to know if he's there. I think he'll call on Mr. Julian later in the morning. Thank you, Miss Hackett."

At eleven ten, a junior typist brought Miss Hackett a glass of milk, which she took in obedience to her doctor, disliking it. She started on a letter. One paragraph, one gulp. As she finished the milk, she was again interrupted.

"Everything okay, Miss Hackett?"

It was a meaningless question. Julian, she told herself, was getting flustered over his Baverbridge estimate.

"I've been over your notes and I've put the cards back in your overcoat pocket." Then she added, "Your uncle is coming to see you sometime today."

"We're too busy. Ring him back, but be diplomatic. Say I'll look in on him on my way up tomorrow."

He passed on to his own room, shutting the door behind him. Miss Hackett dialed Ernest Fanshaw, but the number was busy. She was halfway through the next letter when she heard steps in the reception corridor which did not stop at Inquiries. Her door was opened by a man in early middle-age and of benign appearance.

"I am Detective Inspector Thurtle. May I speak to Mr. Fanshaw, please?"

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"I'll tell him you're here." Miss Hackett went into Julian's room, closely followed by Thurtle. The room was empty.

"Did you expect Mr. Fanshaw to be in his room, Miss Hackett?"

"Yes. He came here from the chart room a few minutes ago. He spoke to me, then went into his room. He must have gone back to the chart room while I was on the telephone and I didn't notice. Will you follow me, please."

She took him through the typists' room. When she opened the inner door of the chart room, Julian did not look up. He was seated sideways at the long table, a writing pad on his knee since there was no room for it on the table, which was covered with maps now opened out and fluttering in the draft.

"I believe we can do the whole job by—hullo, Inspector."

"Good morning, Mr. Fanshaw."

Miss Hackett retired, shutting the door behind her. Julian tore a sheet from the writing pad and clipped it to similar sheets of notes. "Take this chair, Inspector," he invited, rising.

Thurtle did not move. He was gazing at the other with something approaching awe. He meant to be curt and official, but he actually spoke like a human being.

"*Why* didn't you take my warning? It was madness to go through with it."

"Last time we met, Inspector," said Julian, with controlled exasperation, "you told me you believed that I had faked my own double. And you warned me not to murder my uncle. Are you now telling me that my uncle *has* been murdered—and that I have murdered him?"

"If you want to play it that way—yes, to both questions."

"Well, I'm damned! Poor old Uncle Ernest! As you don't believe the double exists, you've come to arrest me?"

"Unless you can account for your movements between eleven o'clock this morning and the present moment—and answer my questions satisfactorily."

"I turned up here about nine-thirty and I haven't left the office. Doesn't leave much scope for questions, does it?"

Thurtle shrugged. His familiar task had suddenly become distasteful. "To save a lot of cross-talk I'll tell you what you're up against." Thurtle told him about the taxi, about Thwaites, about the latter telephoning Miss Hackett—about the window cleaners' foreman and the encounter with Marberry.

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"Marberry spoke to you. And you gave him a funny answer about 'Pretty Polly'—a clever touch that, to clinch the double idea. And you gave it more and more buildup by leaving a trail through the taximan and the window cleaners—to suggest that if you were the murderer you wouldn't be such a fool as to leave a trail of your movements at the most dangerous time."

"Of course I wouldn't!" laughed Julian. "How does it go on?"

"The man who got out of that taxi and came into this building is still in this building—and he can't get out."

"Meaning me?" Julian offered his wrists, as if for handcuffs. "What are you waiting for?"

"All right, if you want to drag it out! How long had you been sitting in that chair when Miss Hackett brought me in here?"

"I haven't left this room since I entered it about ten-thirty."

"Miss Hackett says you were talking to her in her room a few minutes before I turned up."

"I was not!" cried Julian. "But if Miss Hackett said it, she *believed* it to be true. Did she say that I left her and went back to this room?"

"She said you went into that inner room off hers—she thought you were still there."

"And she went into that inner room?"

"Of course she did! So did I. It was empty."

"Did you look in the fireproof closet? It's big enough to hold a man."

Thurtle turned sharply to the door, then checked himself.

"There was no man in that closet, Fanshaw. You're trying to suggest it was the double who spoke to Miss Hackett."

"What for? In the hope of convincing you?"

"You're not bothering about me—you're setting the stage for the jury." When Julian made no answer, Thurtle went on, "We can't search this building properly until the office workers have left. So you can go on stalling until about seven this evening."

Thurtle left the chart room by the outer door and waited in the corridor until Sergeant Boyce reported.

"Four floors and a basement. Total of six offices. We've been through them all, everybody cooperating. The basement gives onto a blind wall approached through the caretaker's living quarters. So the only way out is by the front. Window cleaners will be here most of the day. I've asked 'em to keep their eyes open."

News of the murder had by now reached Julian's staff. Thurtle found it necessary to console Miss Hackett—whereupon she recovered her office manner and proved herself an ideal witness. Like

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many of her kind, she was time-conscious. She explained that the routine had been slightly affected by the Baverbridge estimate.

"It was close to half-past ten when Mr. Fanshaw went to the chart room. By eleven I had finished working on his notes. I made the entries on his postcards"—Miss Hackett smiled on the word—"then took them into his room. Then Mr. Thwaites rang—that would be a minute or so after eleven—asking if Mr. Julian were in the office. Next, the junior brought me my glass of milk—it ought to have been brought at eleven punctually, but it was nearer ten past. I had just finished the milk when Mr. Fanshaw came in from the chart room and spoke to me and then went into his room."

Thurtle decided not to raise the issue of the double.

"And what time was that?"

"It would have been—twelve to fifteen minutes past eleven."

Near enough to the time when Marberry and the foreman of the window cleaners were giving their information to Boyce and himself, noted Thurtle.

"Check this, please, Miss Hackett. Between ten-thirty and eleven-fifteen, you do not know for certain that Mr. Fanshaw was in the chart room—the whole of that time? You only *infer* that he must have been there?"

"If you wish to split hairs, it's possible that he *might* have gone up to see Mr. Marberry for a few minutes—they're putting pressure on the landlord—but it's extremely unlikely, as we are working against time. Anyhow, I know he didn't leave the building."

"How do you know that?"

"Because he never goes out without his overcoat after the first of October"—again the indulgent smile—"and his overcoat was hanging up, as it is at this moment."

She got up and opened the communicating door. Thurtle followed her and contemplated the steely-grey overcoat surmounted by the broad-brimmed homburg.

"He always hangs it there, Miss Hackett? But you don't notice it *every* time you come into the room?"

"I do not," agreed Miss Hackett. "But on this occasion I did—I had to." She told him how she had first put the postcards on the desk. "Then I thought they would be safer in his pocket. So I put them there." She thrust her hand into the breast pocket of the overcoat. "And here they are."

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That was conclusive. Thwaites had stated that the murderer was wearing a grey overcoat and wide-brimmed homburg. And the taxi-man, Marberry, and the foreman of the window cleaners had said the same.

For the first time in his official life Thurtle caught himself trying to shirk a fact because it menaced a theory. It would be absurd to believe that Miss Hackett was lying—making herself an accessory. And Miss Hackett was proving that Julian Fanshaw could not have been the murderer seen by Thwaites and the others—in short, that the double did exist, and the double had killed Ernest Fanshaw.

There was still one loophole—the possibility that Fanshaw was using a duplicate coat and hat. In which case he must have hidden the duplicates in the building.

Thurtle was staring at the postcards Miss Hackett had handed him. As the sense of shock weakened, he studied the notes on the postcards, then returned them to Miss Hackett, who put them back in the pocket of the overcoat.

Before leaving the room, Thurtle lifted the coat from its peg, looked it over back and front, and replaced it. He did the same with the homburg, studying the inside, noting that there was no mark of ownership on the inner band. Next, his eye rested on a metal closet near the window.

"What do you keep in there?"

"Any special documents to be protected from fire, but it's been out of use for the last three months. If you want to look inside I'll have to ask Mr. Fanshaw for the key— Oh, it's not locked—it's not even properly shut!"

She opened the door, revealing an empty interior. If the double existed, that closet would have been large enough to hide him. And so would the similar closets in the chart room.

While explaining Julian's routine and recent movements, Miss Hackett had made use of the diary.

"I see, Miss Hackett, that Mr. Fanshaw went to Manchester on the fifth and stayed overnight. To meet a client, I suppose?"

"I don't know if it was a definite client. He may have gone with the general idea of seeking new business. He gave me no details."

Thurtle thanked Miss Hackett, then went back to the chart room—in search of a duplicate coat and hat.

"I'd like to have a look around, Mr. Fanshaw, especially in those closets."

"Go ahead," said Julian without looking up. "Nothing is locked."

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The first was little more than nests of deep metal drawers, of which three were empty and two contained account books. The second closet was grooved for shelves, but all the shelves had been taken out. It could have concealed an overcoat—or a man, for that matter—but it was empty. The drawers of the filing cabinet were too small even for the hat—as were the drawers in the long table.

Downstairs, Thurtle found Sergeant Boyce in the hall. Two men were guarding the doors. Thurtle spoke to Boyce.

"Grey overcoat and broad-brimmed homburg. See that they don't leave the building on anybody or are carried away by anybody. Examine all outgoing bags and parcels big enough to contain either or both."

Thurtle left the building and walked round the corner to the late Ernest Fanshaw's office, where he received a detailed report from Rouse, the inspector in charge.

He was shown the copy of the *Times* which had been brought in by the murderer and used in the murder. Rouse turned to the page—unstained—which is allotted to small advertisements. Near the center of one column, about two inches had been somewhat clumsily cut out.

"Thought you'd like to have a look at this, sir—I've never seen a cluer clue, myself!" chuckled Rouse. "Jagged edge and all—so when we find the missing bit we can fit it in and know we've found *the* missing bit."

"That sort of thing does happen sometimes." Thurtle grinned. "What's the missing bit about?"

"Just what you'd expect, when you come to think of it." Rouse produced a complete copy of the same edition and read aloud: " 'Legacies. Reversions. Missing relatives. Genealogies traced. Identification formalities executed. Write for appointment. Guardian Agency, 15 Tinbury, E.C. 2.' I've phoned the agency that we want a list of those answering this ad as soon as possible."

"Anything else?"

"Not a thing. The glove—you can buy 'em in any of the chain stores. The commando knife—thousands of 'em have been smuggled out of the Army as souvenirs. Tidiest job on record, I'd say."

In the early afternoon, Inspector Thurtle returned to Julian Fanshaw's office. The guard in the hall reported all quiet. Julian Fanshaw had lunched in the office. On the landing, Thurtle came upon

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Sergeant Boyce talking to a junior typist who had been in charge of the office while the staff was out at lunch.

Thurtle learned from the girl that she had taken the lunch tray to Mr. Fanshaw in the chart room. She had seen him again when he came through the typists' room on the way to his own room. He had been carrying a metal drawer, apparently full of papers. It was a big drawer and she had opened the doors for him. There was no further information, except that the window cleaners had been at work most of the time.

In the office, Miss Hackett reported that Mrs. Fanshaw had come, following a telephone message, and was now with her husband in the chart room.

Thurtle, interviewing Elsa in Julian's room, was favorably impressed by the frankness of her answers about their home life.

"So your routine went on very much as usual these last three months?" When Elsa agreed he asked, "Was your husband absent from home on the night of the fifth of this month?"

The rather beautiful mouth was distorted in a sudden twitch. The answer was a long time coming.

"*Yes.*" It was a strained whisper, as if a damaging admission had been dragged from her. "But there's no reason why I should make a fuss about it—to a police officer." She took a grip of herself. "To the best of my belief, my husband spent that night at Manchester. On the other hand, some neighbors of ours—Mr. and Mrs. Brigstock—will tell you that they saw him dining with me at Blainley's Restaurant that night. For all I know, the Brigstocks—or somebody else—may have seen us going home in the car at about one in the morning. I tell you—I suppose I'd better keep saying 'to the best of my belief'—I tell you that it was *not* my husband! It was this murderer who took me out—and came home with me."

Thurtle was thunderstruck. "Mrs. Fanshaw! A man spent all that time with you and you failed to perceive that he was not your husband—until the following morning!"

She flushed, but she still gave the impression that she was telling the truth.

"You think a woman couldn't possibly make a mistake like that? I thought so, too—in a way, I still think so. I know that sounds like nonsense—oh, please try to look at it from my point of view, Inspector! Julian—that is, the other man—came home in the middle of the afternoon. He said that the trip had been canceled."

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"One minute! With all this double stuff you'd been hearing about, weren't you suspicious?"

"Of course I was! I actually said, 'How do I know you *are* Julian?' I forget how he answered—I forgot even that I had asked him. We had a jolly evening in town."

Thurtle was convinced that she believed her own tale. He beamed like an uncle and encouraged her to give a detailed account of the evening, up to the return home. She added that she had telephoned Miss Hackett at two the following afternoon.

"And when your husband came home that evening, he told you he had spent the previous night at Manchester?"

"No, he didn't. He referred to our evening in town. But I could tell he was pretending. He had met Brigstock on the train, and Brigstock had mentioned that he had seen us at Blainley's. Julian guessed what had happened and wanted to save my face."

That was a nuisance, reflected Thurtle; if Julian had stuck to the Manchester story, it would have been easy to check.

"Let's get this clear, Mrs. Fanshaw. You had a suspicion the moment he turned up on Tuesday afternoon. He talked you out of that. But you must have become suspicious a second time or you wouldn't have rung Miss Hackett."

"Quite true. At breakfast next morning I panicked. I challenged him with a question which only my husband could answer. He was evasive. And when I pressed him for an answer, he was deeply offended and walked out of the house."

"What started the panic?"

"His overcoat, Inspector. When I came downstairs, his coat was in the hall. The sun was on it. And I thought it seemed very slightly different—like the coat I saw on the double at Blainley's—though, even then, I wasn't sure." Her eyes turned to the coat hanging on the peg beneath the homburg. "If you'll look closely at my husband's coat, you'll see that the fabric—"

She stopped short, staring at the coat on the wall, her eyes wide with fear. "It was *that* coat!" The words came in a whisper. "That is the murderer's coat!"

"No need for alarm, Mrs. Fanshaw. I think you're mistaken, but we'll soon make sure. Don't touch it, please." Keeping one eye on Elsa, he opened the communicating door.

"Miss Hackett! Will you kindly ask Mr. Fanshaw to come here—and please come back with him yourself. And I'd be very grateful if you'd send someone to get Sergeant Boyce."

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Elsa was sitting at the desk. She was leaning back in the swivel chair, her eyes closed. Thurtle thought she might have fainted, and he touched her wrist. She opened her eyes as Julian came in. They in silence until Miss Hackett arrived with Boyce.

Thurtle turned to Julian.

"Mr. Fanshaw. This morning Miss Hackett made some notes for you on postcards. May I see the notepad postcards, please?"

"Certainly." He moved toward the desk.

"I put them in the breast pocket of your overcoat," said Miss Hackett, annoyed because he had apparently forgotten.

"Then they'll still be there." Julian felt in the breast pocket of the overcoat. As he withdrew his hand, empty, he touched the cloth, fingered it, then peered at it.

"This is not my overcoat!"

"Right! Stand away from it, please."

The left-side pocket bulged. Thurtle drew out a cleaning glove with a long cuff—fellow to the bloodstained glove found in the wastebasket in Ernest Fanshaw's office. From the folds of the glove a key fell to the floor. Thurtle picked it up with his handkerchief.

"Evidence, Inspector?" asked Julian.

"That's a left-hand glove. A right-hand glove, similar in every way, was found in your uncle's office, bloodstained."

Thurtle lifted the coat from its peg, turned it, revealing the bloodstain near the second button.

"Better look at the hat, too, Mr. Fanshaw."

"Not mine! This one has initials on the inside band. J.F.—standing presumably for 'Julian Fanshaw.' I had no initials in my hat."

Thurtle remembered that the hat he himself had taken from that peg had no initials. And that the overcoat had nothing in the side pockets, and no bloodstain.

"That's the murder coat, all right!" put in Boyce.

"Maybe. But there's a catch in it," said Thurtle. "It's not the coat and hat I examined in this room—hanging on that peg—in Miss Hackett's presence this morning."

"A catch in it!" Julian laughed. "You'll find the same catch in all your evidence, Inspector, until you admit you've made a fool of yourself in accusing me of faking my own double. To everyone else it will be obvious that he walked in here—as me—and planted that coat."

"It's horrible!" cried Elsa. "Things are creeping up behind us and strangling us. Julian, I told Inspector Thurtle that you were in Manchester that night and that the other man was with me."

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"That just about puts the lid on!" Julian dropped into a chair, straddlewise. "Inspector, my wife has been torturing herself with this nightmare until she has come to believe it. I was *not* in Manchester—I was with her."

"Miss Hackett!" boomed Thurtle over Elsa's protest. "Can you contribute anything?"

"I can only say that Mr. Fanshaw left the office with a suitcase at about two-thirty on the Tuesday afternoon and that he returned with the suitcase at about three on Wednesday."

"That doesn't prove that I went to Manchester. I changed my mind after leaving the office and put my suitcase in a cloakroom. I did so precisely because I was afraid my double might turn up and make love to Elsa."

Thurtle glanced at Elsa and received the impression that she believed Julian.

"And where did you happen to be, Mr. Fanshaw, between breakfast time and three o'clock on Wednesday?"

"Walking the streets of London in a state of advanced nervous depression, due to my wife's inability to tell me from another man—and in a general blue funk about this whole twin-brother-double business. Ask me if I met anybody. I didn't. I can't prove any of it. And I don't have to!"

To Elsa his outburst registered as a cry for help.

"I can help you prove you were with me—if you were, Julian. I told the Inspector everything we did. You've only to repeat it."

"I don't see how that will help," muttered Julian. "But here goes. We dined at Blainley's. Brigstock and his wife saw us."

"And after Blainley's, Julian?" Her eagerness revealed that she had changed ground and was ready to believe Julian had been with her in spite of everything, including the coat in the hall.

"After Blainley's we went to a show, but I can't remember which. Nothing sticks out in particular—there was the usual scramble to get out before the curtain calls, to make sure of the last train."

The last train! There came a low moan from Elsa. Julian didn't even know that they had gone from the theater to a nightclub—and then on home in the car, long after the last train.

Without a word to anyone, she walked out of the room, out of the suite. Julian abandoned a half-hearted attempt to follow her. He ignored the others, absorbed in his own thoughts.

"If you don't want me for anything else, Inspector, I'll get back to the chart room," he said absently. "All these upsets are putting me behind in my work . . ."

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At five, the various staffs began to leave. By half-past six Julian—still in the chart room wrestling with estimates—was the only office worker left in the building. Thurtle came in without knocking.

"We shan't be very long now," he announced. "There aren't many spots in this building where a man can hide himself."

"I don't think you'll find him," said Julian indifferently. "He probably planted that coat in my room during lunch hour."

Thurtle found himself staring at the long table, still cluttered with wall maps as it had been when he first saw it. Why should a man want to take a lot of maps from the wall and jumble them all on the table?

"During lunch hour—yes," said Thurtle. "But you planted the coat yourself. When you came into this room this morning from your uncle's office, you hid that coat and hat under those maps there on the table. During lunch hour you carried the coat and hat into the other room in one of those big metal drawers, covering the top with papers to prevent the girl seeing anything."

"You're letting this become an obsession, Thurtle. I thought you'd drop it after our little get-together with my wife—and the coat and the bloodstain and whatnot."

"*And* the visit to Manchester," said Thurtle. "Were you in Manchester that night?"

"No."

"Exactly! You tell us—truthfully—you were not in Manchester, because you know we could check. You tell your wife you were not in Manchester in such a way as to make her certain that you're lying. You worked up suspicion at home by dodging her test question. And this afternoon you *deliberately* fluffed—by leaving out that you went on to the Mignon nightclub and that you went home in your own car. Result: she's ready to swear that she was in the company of the double!"

Julian stared at Thurtle. "In short, everything I say and do is a fake—even if there's no evidence of a fake. You see what I mean by obsession? My dear fellow, talk it over with your sergeant! He'll tell you that the expert searching of this building is sheer footle. He'll tell you that my double planted the coat, removed mine, and then walked out of the building more or less disguised as a window cleaner."

Thurtle looked blank. He had forgotten those window cleaners.

Julian went on, "I don't suppose your men looked very closely at the window cleaners. Under your obsessional orders they were concentrating on me."

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Obsession! Thurtle admitted to himself that the word made him wince. He had certainly formed a theory early in the case—not that you could ever really string facts together without making a theory of some sort!

"If he got himself up as a window cleaner, what did he do with the coat and hat he took off your peg?"

"Obviously he hid them. You'll almost certainly find them somewhere in this office. Now I come to think of it, there's a loose floorboard in my room—parallel with my desk and close to the back. It's been like that for years."

Some five minutes later, Julian was invited into his own room. Thurtle and Boyce stood by while one of the searchers raised the loose floorboard.

"What do you see, Mr. Fanshaw?"

"My overcoat and hat, by the look of it."

Thurtle bent down. There was a clearance of only about three inches between the floorboards and the reinforced concrete. The overcoat had been spread under the adjoining boards and the hat had been flattened. Thurtle coaxed the coat free and held it up.

"Is that your coat?"

"It appears to be. Try the pocket for those cards Miss Hackett put there."

Thurtle withdrew the cards and recognized them from his previous inspection. He laid the coat on a chair and retrieved the hat.

"I'm glad I was right!" chirped Julian.

Boyce and the searchers left the room.

"May I have my hat and coat—they aren't evidence of anything, are they?"

Thurtle felt in the other pockets, which were empty, then handed over the coat. Julian took a clothes brush from a drawer and used it. Then he put on the coat and the hat.

"If I can't be of any further use to you, Inspector, I think I'll go home."

"I can't stop you."

"I gather the murderer has got clean away?"

Their eyes met. Thurtle could only see a man of iron nerve, stimulated by bravado—a man enjoying his own peril.

"Maybe he thinks he got clean away!"

"I have to remember that he will probably turn out to be my twin brother. All the same, I hope you catch him. But even if you don't,

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it won't prove that he doesn't exist. I mean—how *can* you prove that a man does *not* exist? Think it over, Inspector. Good night!"

The police obtained an adjournment of the inquest after formal evidence had been given. Two days after the funeral, Julian Fanshaw, as beneficiary under the reversion with an approximate value of £50,000, filed proof of his uncle's death. The Guardian Agency had received thirty-four answers to its advertisement in the *Times* and the police had checked the list without result.

"Looks like a dead case, Thurtle," said the assistant commissioner—by which he meant that they had already obtained all the evidence that was obtainable. "This twin business! I confess I'm keeping an open mind. Like you, of course, I always disbelieve those yarns about identical twins. But some of the yarns are true. Anyhow, we'll send the papers in and see what happens."

The director of public prosecutions sent the papers back—but he sent with them one of the brighter members of his staff, a man named Mawson, to soften the blow.

"We can't charge Fanshaw as a principal, because we can't prove that the twin—or double—has no existence. Equally, he could not be charged as accessory, principal unknown, because there is no evidence that the two men ever met or communicated with each other."

"Are you breaking it gently to us," asked the assistant commissioner, "that Fanshaw is going to get away with the murder?"

"That's my opinion—I'm not quoting anybody, mind! The strength of Fanshaw's position lies in the evidence his wife will give—that she let the other man spend the evening with her, believing him to be her husband."

"But Fanshaw himself denies it," objected Thurtle.

"Fanshaw denies it to you because you would check and prove he was not in Manchester. But at the trial Fanshaw would obviously exercise his right to *keep out of the witness box*. His wife's evidence would therefore stand. Without some rebutting evidence—which you cannot produce—her evidence would establish the existence of the—call him the Twin. That, in turn, would strengthen the already strong alibi given by Miss Hackett."

Mawson bowed himself out, leaving the two officials in the dumps.

"The funny thing about these office lawyers, sir, is that after a few years of it they know a lot about the law and nothing about anything else, if you understand."

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"Got an idea, Thurtle?"

"You could hardly call it an idea, sir. I'm pretty sure the wife is playing straight—doesn't know she's being used. And I don't think she'll be very pleased when I tell her so."

He went down to Rubington after lunch, trying to work out a tactful approach. It was a distasteful job. He thought of Elsa as a featherhead, but a good woman at heart who deserved a better man.

In the front yard of the Fanshaws' house was a real-estate agent's notice advertising a sale by auction.

"Mr. Thurtle!" She greeted him almost as an old friend. "Have you some good news?"

"Nothing much. I've come down on the chance of picking up something from you." He declined an offer of coffee and said it was too early for tea. "I see you're moving?"

"It's awful here," she admitted. "People don't exactly cut us outright. But they simply don't believe in the twin."

"You can't blame them," he said sympathetically. "You didn't altogether believe in him yourself after that first encounter at Blainley's. Did you?"

"I suppose I didn't, really. It's sort of too much to believe suddenly, isn't it?"

"But by the time of the Manchester incident you believed absolutely in a twin, didn't you?"

"Y-yes, I had to. But it was all loose ends. I didn't say 'because this, therefore that'—the way you do. I had proved to my own satisfaction that it wasn't Julian who took me out that night. A couple of days later, I sort of stood a long way off and looked at the whole thing. It seemed then that I couldn't possibly have mistaken another man for Julian. I believed one thing—then I believed the opposite—then back again. It was muddled and silly, but that was how I felt. And I don't mind telling you now that I thought the police were cheating."

"Well, I'm jiggered! How did we manage to cheat?"

"I thought that you weren't really trying to find the twin because, like the local superintendent, you didn't really believe in him. So after a day or two I went to a private detective."

"And he charged you a lot and told you nothing?"

"That's spiteful, Inspector," she smiled. "He only charged me three guineas and he refused to go on with the case after he had been to

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the hospital to inquire—where they made him believe that a mistake would have been impossible."

That gave Thurtle an inspiration—the first one he had in the entire case. "Don't mind my feelings," he said. "You were disappointed with us. And then you went to one of those agencies that offer to trace missing relatives?"

"How did you know?"

"Hasn't anyone ever told you that your policemen are wonderful? I can even give you the name. The Guardian Agency, in Tinbury."

"I think that was the name. Only, you see, I didn't go. Nothing came of it because, before I had mailed the letter, Miss Hackett rang up telling me about Uncle Ernest. I knew then that you'd *have* to try and find him."

"I'd like to know what you said to the agency. It might give me a new angle."

"I didn't say much—the advertisement said to write for an appointment. Now that I think of it, I don't remember tearing up the letter."

She went to an escritoire. Thurtle held his breath while she opened a drawer and rummaged around. Then she looked under the blotter. "Here it is. It's sealed but not stamped—I remember I didn't have a stamp."

She handed him the envelope. He took out the letter.

"Dear Sir: In answer to the enclosed advertisement in today's *Times*—"

Pinned to the notepaper was the advertisement, clumsily cut, with a jagged edge.

"Are you sure you cut it from the *Times*, as you say in the letter?"

"It's delivered here every morning. I cut it out before Julian took it to the office."

Thurtle's sense of triumph was dampened by pity. There was still a nasty little bit of work to be done.

"I'm glad you happened to show me this, Mrs. Fanshaw." He took out his fountain pen. "It's evidence, among other things, that you believed in the twin and were trying to help the police to find him. I'd like to show it to my chief. Just sign your name on the advertisement, will you—write it so that your signature runs over onto the notepaper."

When she had signed, he gently waved the paper to dry the ink—reflecting that there was no longer any means by which he

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could soften the blow that must come to her. He chattered himself out of the house.

On arriving at the Yard, the Inspector was startled to learn that Mr. Fanshaw had asked to see him and was in the waiting room. Ten minutes later—after Thurtle had checked the advertisement with the copy from which it had been cut—Julian was being shown in.

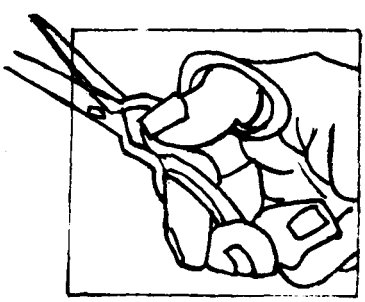
"Good afternoon, Inspector." Julian's face was flushed and the heartiness was self-conscious. "My wife rang me up to say you had seen her and that you were rather enthusiastic over a clipping from a newspaper. Can I be of any help?"

"You can," said Thurtle. "On the day your uncle was murdered, you left home carrying a copy of that day's *Times. Did you give that copy to your twin brother before eleven o'clock—so that he could use it while committing the murder?"*

Julian sighed. For a long moment he looked haggard, then he bucked back into heartiness.

"I guessed what had happened when she told me you'd made her sign the clipping. Odd thing, Inspector, I suddenly became terrified of Miss Hackett—thought I'd sneak round here and get it over with quietly. I'll sign a confession. But you've won on a fluke, you know."

"Fluke be damned!" cried Thurtle. "If you hadn't dragged your wife in as an unconscious accomplice—upset the poor girl's nerves by making her think you were in Manchester that night—she'd never have cut out that advertisement!"



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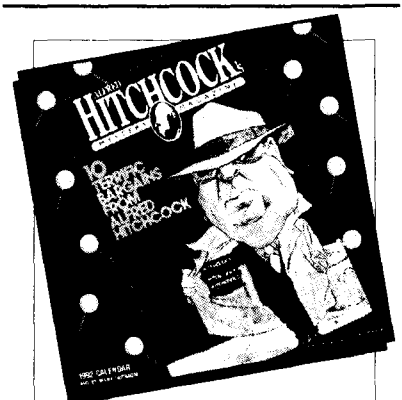

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PLAYING LOTTO? Incredible new systems! "JANUS" Systems are easy, inexpensive! 12 to 30 number combinations. Send $10.00 to: 3-2325 Hurontario St., Suite 162, Mississauga, Ont. L5R 2E9.

RECIPES

GOLD MEDAL Winner original curry recipe. Send $5.00 to: Innovart Imports, Site 18, Box 31, SS1, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2M 4N3.

RECIPES—Cont'd

DELICIOUS Cookies, Cakes, Pies. Send $5/SASE: W. Tracy, 2633 Kowis, Houston, TX 77093.

KOLACHE Recipe - old Czech. $2.00 no checks. W.D. Borden, Box 742, Matagorda, TX 77457.

THREE Delicious Meat Pies in one hr. Great use of leftovers. $5.00, Sase to: Alice, RD #1, Box 166, Addison, NY 14801.

MEXICAN Sauces; 3 easy recipes. Sase & $2: P.O. Box 144592, Coral Gables, FL 33134.

SONGWRITERS

$1,200.00 CASH PRIZE. Poems Wanted For Songs. Radio-TV Promotions - Recordings - Publishing. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 34278.

START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

MAKE Big money with over 2500 items. $3.00 brings giant catalog - refunded with first order. M.R.M. Wholesaler, P.O. Box 40596, Dept. IO-1, Providence, Rhode Island 02940-0596.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

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CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $52.50 for 15 Words or Less
$3.50 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME _____

FIRM (NAME IN AD) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ **STATE** _____ **ZIP** _____

PHONE: _____ **DATE:** _____

YOUR SIGNATURE _____

_____ Words at $3.50 each $ _____

_____ Capitalized word at 40¢ each _____

Total amount for 1 ad $ _____

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $

(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85

(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example: One 15 word ad $52.50 x 3 months = $157.50 x .85 = $133.87)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$52.50**	(2) **$52.50**	(3) **$52.50**	(4) **$52.50**	(5) **$52.50**
(6) **$52.50**	(7) **$52.50**	(8) **$52.50**	(9) **$52.50**	(10) **$52.50**
(11) **$52.50**	(12) **$52.50**	(13) **$52.50**	(14) **$52.50**	(15) **$52.50**
(16) **$56.00**	(17) **$59.50**	(18) **$63.00**	(19) **$66.50**	(20) **$70.00**
(21) **$73.50**	(22) **$77.00**	(23) **$80.50**	(24) **$84.00**	(25) **$87.50**
(26) **$91.00**	(27) **$94.50**	(28) **$98.00**	(29) **$101.50**	(30) **$105.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017, 7 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone # 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each. Garden City, New York 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D. F.O.B. P.O. U.S.A. 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word (PO Box 145 count as 3 words). *Websters International Unabridged Dictionary* will be used as our authority for spelling compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

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NEXT—SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

Featuring a short novel by CLARK HOWARD (Dark Conception)
plus 15 stories—9 *NEW*—by

P. D. JAMES	**JOHN le CARRE**
GRAHAM GREENE	**DOUG ALLYN**
JOYCE PORTER	**ANDREW KLAVAN**
GEORGE BAXT	**MARGARET YORKE**
STANLEY ELLIN	**PETER TURNBULL**

and others

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Editor-in-Chief
(1941–1982)

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POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, IA 51591. In Canada return to 1801 South Cameron, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3E1. ISSN: 1054-8122. Davis GST: R123293128. For back issues, send $3.50 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462.

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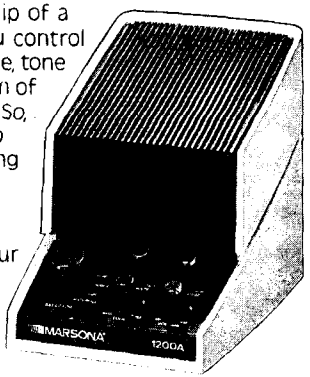
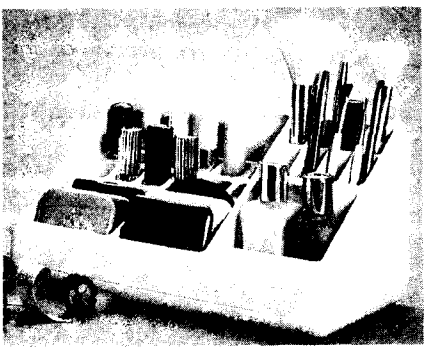
▼ SOUND CONDITIONER

Noise pollution is all around us in this fast-paced world. But sound conditioning is a practical approach to coping with noise that allows you to sleep, relax, and concentrate better. Marpac, a pioneer in sound conditioning has produced the new Marsona® 1200 A Sound Conditioner. This compact unit electrically synthesizes a variety of soothing natural sounds that helps screen out and reduce the problem of unwanted noise. The sounds of ocean surf, rushing waterfalls and rainfall can be yours with the flip of a switch. You control the volume, tone and rhythm of the sound. So, get back to the soothing sounds of nature without leaving your home. **$139.98** ($5.25) #A1971.



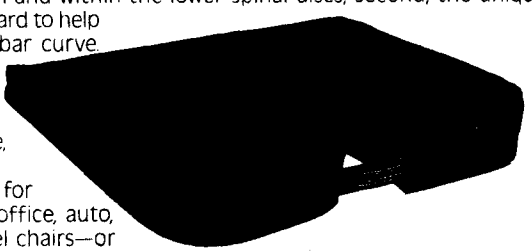
▼ A COSMETIC ORGANIZER THAT REALLY WORKS!!



This cosmetic organizer is the best we've seen. Created by Organizational Specialist Reina Alexis Barone™, this attractive, efficient organizer is designed to showcase fine cosmetics on top of dressing table or vanity to enhance any room decor. Holds up to 40 different cosmetic items. Made in the USA. Measures 12" x 6", scratch resistant. ABS plastic with a high gloss finish and non skid, non scratch base. Accessories not included. **$27.98** ($5.00) #A1928.

▼ TUSH CUSH

Are you one of the millions of Americans who suffers from low back pain? Do hours of prolonged sitting leave you aching or numb? If so, the revolutionary orthopedic "Tush Cush"™ is the seat of your dreams. This scientifically designed seat works to relieve and prevent back pain in 2 ways: first, it suspends the tailbone (coccyx) in the air and reduces the pressure on and within the lower spinal discs, second, the unique wedge shape tips the pelvis forward to help restore the spine's nature lumbar curve. Constructed of highly resilient polyurethane foam, the "Tush Cush"™ comes with a removable, machine washable, dark brown cover. It measures 14"x18" and features a handle for easy toting. Perfect for home, office, auto, sporting events, theatres, wheel chairs—or anywhere your "tush" needs a 'cush'ion! **$39.98** ($5.00) #A1967.



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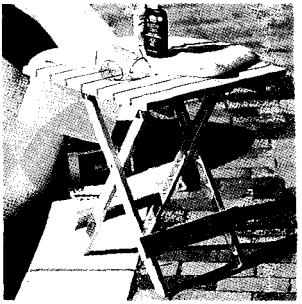
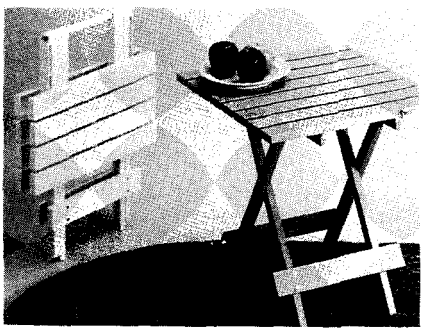
▼ QUIK-FOLD® — A TABLE ON THE GO

Simply grasp the edges of this clever patented table — the top separates, the halves flip down and a convenient handle appears from nowhere! Weighing just 8 pounds, it totes easily wherever needed; lift the edges and it's instantly positioned. 21" tall, it has a 19½"x21½" surface with plenty of room for snacks, plant display, games, you name it.



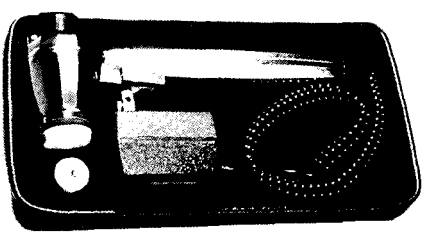
POOLSIDE ►

INSIDE ◄



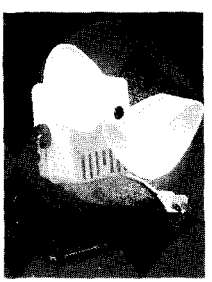
The fact that the durable styrene is the kind used for football helmets indicates its strength and impact resistance, plus it's entirely water-safe in kitchen, bath or outdoors. Three attractive colors are molded in, not painted — so no peeling or chipping. Specify Off-white, #A1831; Slate Blue #A1832; Red, #A1833. Any color just **$19.98** ($6.50).

▼ TREAT YOUR TIRED MUSCLES SUCCESSFULLY!



The Novafon Sonic Massager from West Germany boasts over one half million users in Europe and hundreds of sports trainers, physiotherapists, health clinics and physicians recommend the Novafon worldwide. That's because mixed frequencies of sound (up to 10,000 oscillations per second) penetrate 2¼" beneath the skin to stimulate blood circulation and relax stressed muscles. Made of light metal alloy, and with no moving parts to wear out, it's completely safe. 7½", 8oz., 14" coiled cord extends to 6 ft. Comes with 1 flat, 1 rounded washable head, handsome carrying case. 1 year warranty. NOVAFON SONIC MASSAGER **$135.98** ($10.00) #A1953.

▼ MIGHTY LITTLE FAN



The most important qualities of a household fan are safety, quietness, portability and force enough to get the air circulating. We've found a little powerhouse of a fan that meets all these criteria admirably. This two-speed fan is completely safe — if the spin of the soft plastic blades is interrupted, the fan stops without so much as marking a finger. The blades measure 7". We offer this fan in white for **$21.98** ($4.00) #A1604. Two for **$38.98** ($5.00) #A16042.

TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 091 EL; P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-365-8493**. NJ residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

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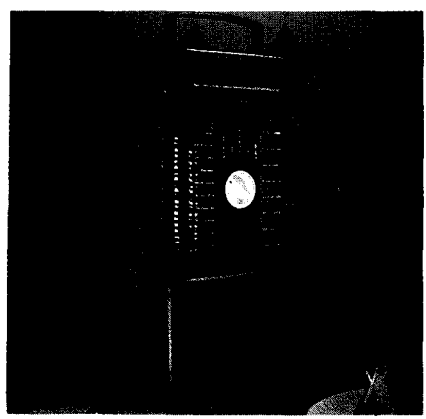
MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ FRESH AIR

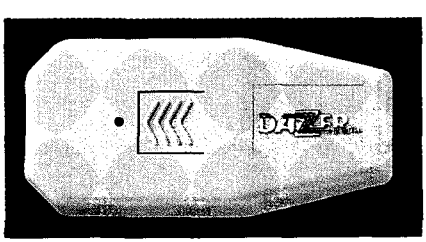
Concern about air pollution is on the rise. The Pollenex® Pure Air "99" Air Cleaner with Ionizer will help clear the air around you. A high voltage generator produces negative ions that help reduce minute particles of dust, tobacco smoke and other airborne pollutants. An electrostatic air filter intercepts larger airborne particles and has a deodorizing action too. Two speed air flow control. So now you can breathe easier with Pure Air "99". **$69.98** ($7.50) #A1962; 2 for **$125.98** ($10.00) #1962/2

► D-BUG LIGHT



Don't let flying pests spoil your next outdoor activity. Just bring along the D-Bug Light, electronic bug killer lantern. More than just a great bug zapper, this unit combines the zapper with a fluorescent lantern and a safety blinker. Portable and easy to carry with its own handle, the D-Bug Light is made of high impact durable plastic. Uses two 6 volt batteries (not inc.) 12 volt DC receptacle adapts to car, RV or boat battery, so its great for camping, boating, picnics, backyards. So don't let bugs spoil your outdoor fun—just "de-bug"! **$59.98** ($5.00) #A1964.

▼ THE DAZER™



Even the most dedicated canine aficionado can sometimes encounter unfriendly dogs. Dazer™ provides a humane way to repel their advance, emitting ultrasonic sound waves inaudible to humans and totally safe for dogs (unlike mace and other common deterrents). Pocket size (4¾" long) plastic case can also clip on belt; takes 1-9V battery, included. For joggers, hikers, bikers, seniors and kids—plus the proverbial postman. **$29.98**, ($3.00) #A1829X.

TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 091 EL, P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-365-8493**. NJ residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

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